

Don Ramsburg Talks About The 'Tale Of The Fox,' 1976 Audi Fox That Is

By Don Ramsburg

In December of 1975, I was driving a 1967 Volkswagen Squareback that was getting tired. I already had the engine rebuilt once when the pistons seemed to be swapping holes, at about 80,000 miles. Those air-cooled engines had some advantages, but longevity wasn't one of them. The car now had over 125,000 miles on it, and I was thinking about searching for another car. I had never owned a new car, but had bought a new '74 Toyota pickup truck in December of 1973.

I decided to look at some new cars to see

pup. It was 'Ice Blue', a pale shade of metallic blue enamel. It looked very much like the Volkswagen Dasher but with a lot more class.

The salesman let me drive a demonstrator, but he sat in the front passenger seat. Anne Marie was in the back seat. I drove down the Baltimore Beltway to Cromwell Bridge Road, and then to Luskin's parking lot. When I got to an open area, I punched the Audi to see what it would do. To my amazement, it was as snappy as the Rabbit I had driven! I drove back to the dealership thinking about how I might be able to afford an Audi Fox and was pleasantly sur-

that no catalytic converter was required. The engine had pistons milled out to clear the valves, so if the rubber timing belt broke, the pistons would not bend the valves before the engine stopped spinning. This was a nice feature, but was probably responsible for the moderate compression ratio of 8.00 to 1.

Of course, like the Rabbit, the Fox also had the agility of front wheel drive. Unlike the Rabbit, the engine was in line with the car, instead of transverse mounted. The car was very throttle responsive because it only weighed 1900 pounds; so said the dealer.

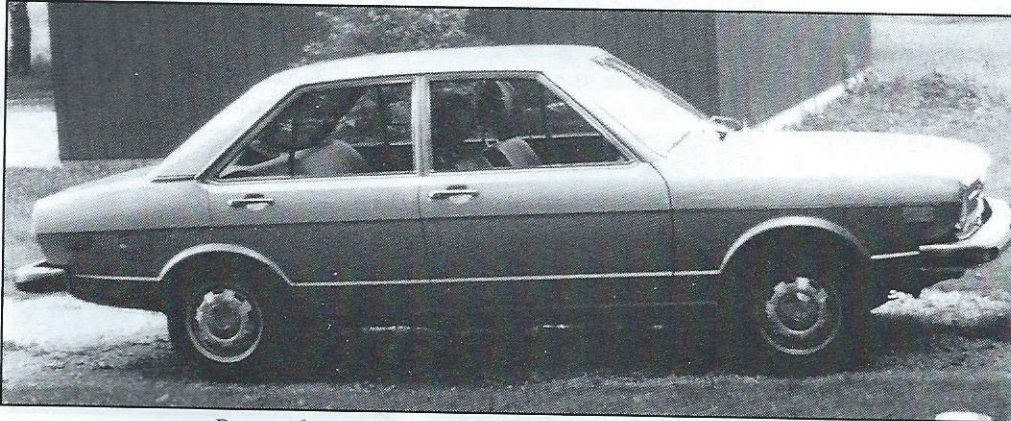
In 1976 the new car warranty was only 10,000 miles or one year, whichever occurred first. All was fine until 12,000 miles, when the car started to run very poorly. I pulled off the distributor cap and found a lot of metal dust inside the distributor. After removing the distributor from the car, I disassembled it and found the weights on the centrifugal advance were scraping the walls of the distributor, filling the inside with aluminum powder. How could the weights touch the distributor wall, I wondered? I found that the weights had worn part way through the pivot pins, allowing them to touch the inside wall of the distributor. I went to the dealership and bought a new distributor for \$200. After I installed the new distributor, the Fox ran like new again. I thought the problem was solved. After another 12,000 miles, Anne Marie and I were heading down to Ocean City on U.S... 50. We were driving through Cambridge, when suddenly the car started running poorly again. I pulled into a parking lot, and removed the distributor cap. Sure enough the distributor was full of metal dust again. Fortunately, there was a junkyard in sight and I was able to buy a used distributor from a Volkswagen Dasher for \$50. I installed the used distributor, and by this time I was becoming irritated. Maryland didn't have a lemon law yet, if it did, I would surely have used it.

I went to see the Audi dealer, and demanded to know what the story was. He said they had no other cases like mine and recommended that I talk to the Audi factory representative who was scheduled to visit them soon, they said they would notify me when he was in. When I spoke with the factory representative, he said he had never heard of a problem like mine and offered to buy me a new distributor. I grudgingly agreed, because I was sure I would need it. Sure enough, in another 12,000 miles, the problem occurred three more times.

Useful suggestion...

At that time, I was working with another engineer by the name of Richard Malone. Rich was a good friend, and we often had lunch together. One day, I was telling Rich about my problems with the Fox, he offered a hypothesis. He said: "Maybe something is wrong with your oil pump and the microphonic vibrations are traveling up

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Don and Anne Marie Ramsburg's 1976 Audi Fox Sedan

what was available. Since I owned a couple of Volkswagens, and had enjoyed the experience. I decided to look at new Volkswagen models.

VW Beetles were now fuel-injected and no longer had torsion bar suspension. The Rabbit and Dasher were the newest models, were liquid-cooled, front engine, and front wheel drive. I asked the dealership on York Road near Timonium, if they had a car I could test drive. They showed me an ugly green Rabbit, with a four-speed manual transmission they used for a demonstrator.

York Road's the test track...

Anne Marie and I got in the Rabbit I drove the car north on York Road. I think the dealership had breathed hard on the engine because that little Rabbit was fast! This was my first experience with a front wheel drive vehicle and I was amazed at the handling. At Belfast Road, I took the entrance to Interstate 83 to see how the car performed at highway speed. I wound it out to 70 mph in third gear and I swear it chirped the tires when I shifted to fourth!

The VW Rabbit was an impressive car to drive, but certainly not to look at. The interior was too small to carry my guitar or my rifle cases without folding down the back seat. Since I still had two kids at home, I decided to look a little more to see what else was available. A few miles away, in Towson, there was an Audi/Porsche dealership. Anne Marie and I stopped in to see what they had available.

On the showroom floor, was an Audi Fox two-door sedan that was as pretty as a speckled

prised when I was told the car was only about \$50 more than a Volkswagen Dasher. I ordered an Audi Fox 4-door sedan in dark metallic blue for about \$6,000. In those days, there were no discounts on Audi cars, everybody paid list. After a few weeks the dealer called me to say the car I ordered was not yet available but he had a new Audi Fox 4-door sedan in Ice Blue if I wanted it. Oh, yeah, I wanted it all right. Anne Marie and I went to pick up the car. This was a brand new 1976 Audi Fox, with a 4-speed manual transmission, crank windows, and no air conditioning. I probably had the only Audi in Maryland without air-conditioning.

A real pleasure...

The Fox was a pleasure to drive. The engine was so smooth, I sometimes forgot to shift and would find myself cruising at 70 mph in third gear. It had a 1588 cc engine with a single overhead cam and mechanical fuel injection. Even though the engine used a single overhead camshaft there were no rocker arms. The Audi used a wedge combustion chamber with all the valves in line. The cam follower was a steel cup that fit over the end of the valve stem, it had shims added to adjust the valve clearance. This probably accounted for the high rpm available from the small four cylinder engine.

The Audi fuel injection was continuous flow, meaning that the fuel sprayed on the intake valves continuously, vaporizing from the heat and was sucked into the cylinders when the intake valves opened. The system was easy to maintain, easy to adjust, and efficient enough

Technical Chairman, Gary Ruby on: Engine Coolant

Hi Guys! This month I'd like to discuss engine coolants. Coolants and anti-freeze are the same thing. In warm climates it's referred to as coolant, in colder climates, anti-freeze. If you wonder why they call it 'permanent' it's used year around. Back in the day, people used plain water in the summer time and methanol alcohol in winter. It worked well in the pre 1950's era. But it also caused a lot of rust in cooling systems. Remember when 'flushing' the cooling system was a yearly task?

I recently went online to learn more. I hope the following information will help you understand more about anti-freeze. The first 'ethylene glycol' was sold to the public beginning in 1928, so it's been around for a long time.

Prestone says their new formulations made with ethylene glycol also use organic acid technology. Ford, General Motors and some Asian automobile manufacturers use inhibitors and other additives to help lubricate and protect cooling system components including water pump and radiator.

According to Prestone, new coolants will last for five years or 150,000 miles and they are compatible with all late model cars and trucks and many older vehicles as well. Prestone, Zerex, Peak and other manufacturers add a dye to their product to identify from others and because anti-freeze is nearly clear. Remember, ethylene glycol is **TOXIC** to pets and animals. It can be absorbed through the pads in their feet. If you suspect a pet may have walked through anti-freeze, immediately wash their paws with warm soapy water. Don't pour it down the drain or leave it in a pan in the shop. Anti-freeze has a sweet taste that children and pets may drink.

When storing your classic for the winter, if you can, leave the parking brake off; if rust forms on the brake cables the brake won't be locked up. Same goes for your daily driver, unless you're parked on a hill. See ya next month! **GARY**

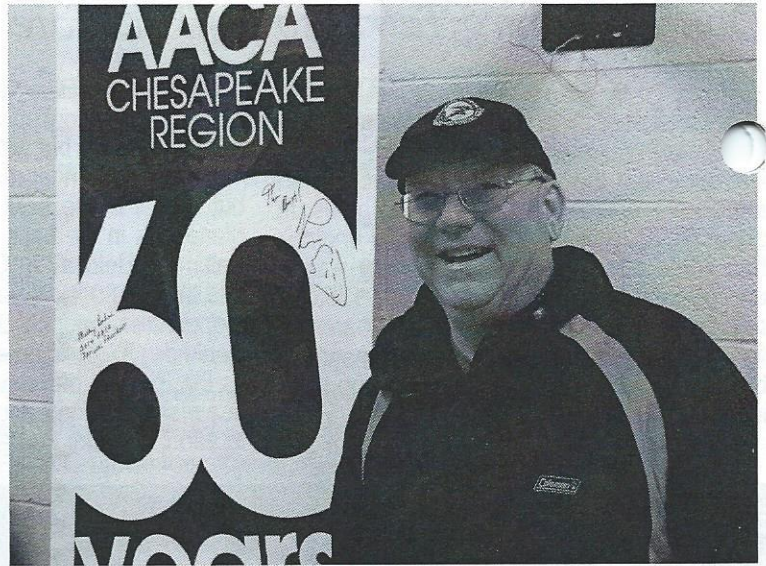
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the shaft to the distributor." This had merit to me, because the distributor shaft mated with the oil pump shaft and they were driven by the same gear. I bought a new oil pump and an oil pan gasket; hired my next door neighbor, a retired auto mechanic, to replace the oil pump while I was at work. After installation, when I would turn the shaft on the old oil pump, there was a noticeable click when it passed a certain position in its rotation. After that, I never had any more distributor problems but the car had over 90,000 miles by then. This would surely qualify as a lemon.

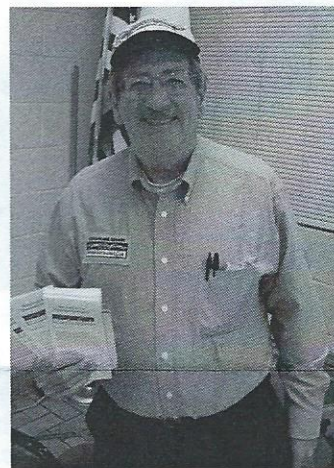
Another friend of mine purchased a used '76 Audi Fox two-door sedan in Ice Blue. He said he bought it because he liked my car so much when I gave him a test drive. One night he lent the car to his son, who proceeded to total the car. His car had fewer miles than mine so I bought the engine out of the wreck for \$200. I had about 180,000 miles on the odometer and the valves in the engine were worn. The Audi engine had no cam bearings, so when the front cam bearing surface, in the aluminum head, would wear down from the tension of the timing belt, it would cause the valve clearances to get tighter, leading to burnt valves. I decided to swap the engines myself, since I had plenty of past experience working on my old cars. This turned out to be pretty easy, and I was able to do it under the limb of an old maple tree next to my driveway.

The '76 Fox was running fine again, but other things were starting to fail, like the exhaust system and shock absorbers. I drove the car until it had 225,000 miles, then I gave it to my son in 1992. He drove it another couple years before it died.

Lemon or not, the '76 Audi Fox was one of the best cars I have ever owned. It performed and handled like a sports car, and was getting 31 mpg. Tough act to follow, but I replaced it with a new '92 Ford Taurus SHO...and that's another story!



Club Director, Past President, Flea Market Guru, Tom Young



Nick passed out club information and made everyone feel welcome, thanked them coming, all day Saturday. Above left: Laurie Robinson, Barb Muldowney, President Paula Ruby, toil away in the serving line.



Cashiers: Helen Gordon, Maddie Ebbert, Below: Henry Chaudron, Sr., 'General' Wilmer

