

Otherwise Engaged

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Das Auto

By Leighton Schreyer

I think of my father whenever I see a Volkswagen,
their pride and glory one and the same:
German engineering.

Precision, that is, in all you do. Perfection.
Measure twice, cut once.
No mistakes.

It was one of the first things my father taught me,
tape measure in hand,
marking millimeters

as if they mattered because, to him, they did. A slip, no matter
how small, would stain his reputation.
Shatter it.

I revered my Father the way a little girl does: as though he
were
a superhero, capable of conquering
the world

with his superhuman strength and supersonic speed; of
protecting me
from the monsters in my closet
and under

my bed, where I hid sometimes when I was
mad or sad or scared of
being seen.

He promised to slay the werewolves, howling and hungry for
flesh;
to chase away the bitter, begrudging ghosts of

my past.

He was invincible. Untouchable. At least in my eyes—the eyes of a little girl pining for her Papa’s indifferent affection

and unuttered approval, which seemed to be reserved for only that which bore the mark of a German engineer.

It was indisputable then. I had to become a German engineer—my designs had to be precise, their execution had to be perfect.

And it had to start with one of the most critical characteristics of the car: its body.

The specifications were exact.

The frame had to be light, made of aluminum preferably, to decrease the weight of the vehicle without compromising its strength;

the rear end slightly wider and heavier set than the front, but proportionately so.

The skeleton had to be stiff. Sturdy. Rigid and robust. It had to be apt at resisting tension and torque; had to bend, not break, under pressure.

The lacquer—

candy apple red or olympic blue, something flashy—
masked the body so it had to be applied generously to hide
any defects.

The car
had to be efficient. Maximum productivity
achieved with minimum wasted effort or expense, in which
case

the key
measure was how many
kilometers could be covered with a single tank of fuel.

The rider
had to feel safe, secure,
imbued with a sense of confidence that the car was under

their control;
they had to trust the car would do exactly
what they wanted. A docile dog following curt commands.

Sit.

Stay.

Stand.

Take it.

Leave it.

Look.

Wait.

Watch me.

Down.

Drop it.

Roll over.

Shake a paw.

Speak.

Quiet.

Come.

Heel.

If I followed these specifications just so—if I measured twice
before
cutting and made no mistakes—then maybe ~~my body~~
my car

would also be worthy of being
touted as the product of a
German engineer.