

Idiosyncratic by Joe Sage

Electric vehicles are at an inflection point. They are still a small percentage of the vehicles we drive, a smaller percentage for the general public, and we suspect a great many have not even ridden in one yet. Yet everybody has heard about them—a lot. And the VW ID.4 has received plenty of buzz.

It may seem it will take awhile for EVs to become utterly common, but one manufacturer after another has announced a death date for internal combustion engines—including Volkswagen.

EV attributes do little to differentiate one from another—rapid acceleration, low center of gravity, the adventures of recharging. The ID.4's cross-over form is also basically universal—cargo capacity, a higher-than-a-sedan viewpoint and so on.

So let's see what's specific to the ID.4.

Royale With Cheese. If you've ever seen the film classic *Pulp Fiction*, you may remember a scene in which hitman Vincent asks hitman Jules whether he's ever been to Amsterdam. No, he has not. Well, says Vincent, they have all the same stuff as here, it's just... everything is a little different. We were reminded of this many times in the ID.4, which

seems to have gone out of its way to be different, in feature after feature, style point after style point, from door handles to its oddball shifter. It's a noteworthy effort overall, for a low-volume vehicle.

Power player. A point of bemusement was the "engine start-stop" switch, labeled as such, since the industry makes a concerted effort to clarify that EVs have a motor, not an engine. Perhaps this is a parts bin item, something they had plenty of sitting around already. There's irony in this, in a vehicle in which everything else is purposely different.

Interest in the wording on the button was soon eclipsed by its function—if it has one. There can be a fine line between intuition and ambiguity. VW seems to have sought an intuitive "ready when you are, and done when you're done" approach to turning the ID.4 on and off (something not noticed during the nonstop-swap Texas Auto Roundup, also in this issue, where it won an award). As with most such things, you'll likely get used to it over time. But we found it confusing to figure out whether that "engine" button did much, on or off, or whether it could just be ignored. It seems you

can just hop in, put your foot on the brake pedal and be ready to go without it. But at the end of a drive, it was disturbing (and time consuming) to try to figure out whether the car was off before walking away from it. Instruments would often read the same before or after hitting that button, though not always. There's no drivetrain noise, regardless. And we'd have the key with us. But was it off? It was a consistently uncomfortable experience.

Checking the screens didn't help much, often overtaken by a persistent backup camera, even if the shifter was not in R, but rather Park or Drive.

Go mode. The ID.4 is a rear-driver (an all-wheel-drive version arrives later this year; see sidebar). There is just one forward gear, with the same ratio as reverse (2.96). Once you figure out—or simply go with the flow of—the start-stop button and/or procedure, it's time to get in motion.

Though the shift controller is largely hidden from sight behind the steering wheel, a readout in the binnacle screen, once you're oriented, helps you (mostly) get along by feel and that confirmation.

There are two layers of drive modes in the ID.4. As with most current vehicles, it offers more conventional drive modes—eco, comfort, sport, custom. More distinctively, it also offers a significant

option that overlays or underlies all the rest.

Besides Park and Reverse, the shifter gives you a D/B selection (also referred to as drive modes in documentation). D-as-in-Drive, the default, comes with a visual delight, a band of light flashing across the width of the car below the windshield.

As in any EV (and some hybrids and others), a regenerative braking system captures waste energy used in stopping, feeding it back to the battery. The D setting allows coasting when you take your foot off the accelerator pedal, generally the feeling you are familiar with (including the drive motor's inertia giving you a feel of slight deceleration, and the rear wheels maintaining enough grip for control). When you hit the brakes, you may feel just a subtle difference as force is redirected to charge.

B-as-in-Brake is your other option (to go, not to brake), in this position applying immediate and stronger deceleration, somewhat akin to driving a golf cart or other familiar full-electric. It does not, however, bring you to a complete stop, as some do—you still need to apply the full brakes. B mode is especially useful in a situation such as stop-go-zipper-merge traffic, as we had for a lane closure.

Controlwise, you can switch between D and B as freely as you want, though their behaviors are different enough that you probably won't want to—you'll try both, but each has its place.

Brakes are already commonly part of most vehi-

cles' electronic stability control (ESC) or dynamic handling systems. Volkswagen has a new system—Vehicle Dynamics Manager (which debuted last year on the European Mk 8 Golf GTI, due to arrive here this year)—in which brake-involved stability systems are integrated into an EV's regenerative braking. The ID.4 includes this system as standard.

Together, ESC and regenerative braking take control of wheel-selective brake interventions via an XDS electronic transverse differential lock with a digital target model to achieve optimum driving and steering behavior. As soon as you turn into a corner, steering is electronically optimized to be spontaneous, linear and accurate.

We can confirm this works well—a righthand surface street corner with a rain trough will make many an automatic pause noticeably as you slow, turn, dip and accelerate, but the ID.4 remained strong and responsive throughout, benefiting from the combination of this system and advanced independent suspension front and rear.

Despite its 4559-lb weight, this EV has excellently balanced handling even on hills and twisties. (It also has an exceptionally tight turning circle.) Absorbing road surfaces is a different story, transmitting the sound of every pavement imperfection, due to its quiet running, but also quite harsh on parking lot speedbumps.

(cont'd)



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Zwickau-Mosel plant, Germany
CONSTRUCTION	.....unitary / steel
CLASS / SEATS	.....small SUV / five
MOTOR	.....PSM permanent magnet
HP/TORQUE	.....201 hp / 229 lb-ft
BATTERY	.....lithium-ion 82 kWh / 77 kWh net; voltage 240-400V; weight 1087 lb
ELECTRICAL	.....onboard max rate 11 kW; DC fast charge max rate 125 kW
DRIVETRAIN	.....RWD
TRANSMISSION	.....automatic (1st/reverse)
SUSPENSION	.....F: Strut-type w lower control arms, coils, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar; R: multi-link w coils, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar
STEERING	.....single-pinion elec pwr
BRAKES	.....F: 13.4 x 1.1-in vented; R: 11.0 x 2.0-in rear drums
WHEELS	.....(1st Edition) F: 8J x 20 alum alloy; R: 9J x 20 alum alloy (standard) 8J x 19 alum alloy
TIRES	.....(1st Edition) F: 255/50 R20; R: 255/45 R20 a/s (standard) F: 235/50 R19; R: 255/50 R19 a/s
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....180.5 / 108.9 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....33.56 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....41.1 / 38.4 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....41.1 / 37.6 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....30.3 / 64.2 cu.ft
APPR / DEPART / BRKOVER	.....17.5 / 21.2 / 17.1°
TOW CAPACITY	.....(braked/not) 2200/1650 lb
WEIGHT	.....4559 lb
RANGE	.....260 miles
MPGe	.....107/91/99 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	.....\$43,995
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1195
TOTAL	.....\$45,190

2021 VOLKSWAGEN ID.4 LINEUP

Pro	.....RWD	.....\$39,995
	.....AWD	.....43,675
Pro S	.....RWD	.....\$44,495
	.....AWD	.....48,175
1st Edition	.....RWD	.....\$43,995
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....	.....1195



"MOST AFFORDABLE AWD EV"

Expected to arrive at dealers in the fourth quarter of 2021, the Volkswagen ID.4 AWD stakes a claim as of now as the most affordable all-wheel-drive electric vehicle on sale in the US, starting at an MSRP of \$43,675. The ID.4 AWD is a dual-motor setup with 295 hp, a zero-to-60 time of 5.7 seconds, and an EPA-estimated range of 249 miles for the AWD Pro, 240 miles for the AWD Pro S. Tow capacity is 20 percent higher than the ID.4 RWD 1st Edition we are driving here, at 2700 lb when using a braked trailer. Reservations can be made at vw.com/id4.

Ours was a 1st Edition, a limited run for the first year, with white badging (especially neat against our white paint) and the whitest white-on-white interior imaginable (you won't want to eat or get a paper cut in this one). Virtually every control and interface (wheel and pedals aside) is virtual. "Make it touch... let's make it ALL touch!" must have been a design mantra. It's reminiscent of a SpaceX Dragon Capsule. The pedals pick up a design cue from consumer electronics—brake and accelerator (on the 1st Edition, anyway) are prominently marked with "pause" and "play" icons.

Not unique to this car is the need to deep-dive into the screen for too many things—including climate control (which offers remote and prescheduled possibilities), and oddly even including the odometer (you can see your range at all times, but if you want to do the usual cumulative or comparative math, you have to dig). The remaining range does seem to be fairly accurate. Whatever way the information is presented, people can handle it—all in all, it's little different from keeping an eye on your fuel tank in an internal combustion vehicle.

The car is rife with artificial intelligence or its stylistic or functional equivalent. An ongoing point of interest was whether it was calculating key needs or just assuming them. You will no doubt learn to conquer the mysteries of turning the vehicle on and off (and/or knowing you have), but we always question an operational interface that can't be immediately understood by a borrower.

It's an interesting mix of simplicity and complexity—for all its capabilities, touchpoints are few. We were surprised that a car with electric everything, and the top-of-the-line model at that,

did not have memory for its mirrors and seat. Even the console, which would feature various controls and connectivity points in most vehicles, is devoid of anything other than its cupholders.

Not all our experiments were 100 percent repeatable, which brings elements of its intuitive layers back into play. The uncertainty of whether the vehicle is truly off when it's time to walk away is inversely echoed by the AC cutting off even if you just step outside for a moment (which is a moment too long; it was 115-120° while we had the ID.4). There is, however, a quick cooling feature (with debatable effect in our extreme climate, but again that issue is not unique to this).

Tackling features can be an adventure—we made an unusually voluminous 59 voice memos during our week with this, totaling an hour and a half. To sum them up, an owner is likely to treat this vehicle as a bit of a hobby, sort of like their first computer—challenging, sometimes frustrating, but almost always fun. The bigger portion of time actually driving is the best part of the ID.4.

Everything being relative, VW is not the earliest adopter of an EV powertrain, but they're right on the wave of stating a broad electric future. "It did take us awhile to catch up with the trends," VW told us in a zoom conference. We were surrounded in traffic by a lot of early adopters who have in most cases spent a lot more for their vehicles. It's a pretty self-satisfied feeling being in this more affordable one. Volkswagen's timing seems good, not too early not too late. They currently anticipate the ID.4 to be seven to eight percent of sales this year and just announced that by 2035, their lineup will be 100 percent battery electric. ■





NORRA MEXICAN 1000 - BAJA VW ID.4 is first production-based EV to finish

A specially prepared Volkswagen ID.4 electric SUV completed the NORRA Mexican 1000 race in Baja, one of 64 out of 90 cars and trucks entered that finished the entirety of the event.

Driven by pro racer Tanner Foust and managed by Tanner Foust Racing, the Rhys Millen Racing modified rear-wheel-drive ID.4 1st Edition model ran its stock 201-hp electric motor, 82 kWh battery pack and drive systems.

The interior was stripped and modified with a roll cage, racing seats and supplemental screens for key data like battery temperature. Suspension was thoroughly reworked with rally-style coil-over struts at all four wheels, tubular lower control arms in the front and boxed lower rear links. The radiator was raised several inches to improve approach angles and cooling capacity, and additional 3/8-inch steel skid plates were added to the undercarriage. With stages from 33 to 167 miles, the ID.4 was able to recharge mostly from a



portable biofuel-powered generator connected to a 50 kW flat charger.

In a couple of instances where the ID.4 was ready to transit to the next stage but the charger was not available, the team flat-towed it behind a chase vehicle for a short distance, with regenerative braking adding range. The only damage suffered by the ID.4 in the tough Baja wilderness was some cosmetic injury to the rear bumper. All key power, battery and control systems performed as expected. The ID.4 was raced mostly in "B" level battery regeneration mode with stock traction control turned on. Foust drove most of the race, with writer and off-road racer Emme Hall completing two stages.

*Welcome to a world
where the roads are dry,
the cars are slick and the
destinations are limitless...*



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