

Title:

An Open Letter to All VW Owners

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675

Summary:

Volkswagen owners have a chance to make driving more fun and make a positive impact on the road. This is an invitation -- an attempt to evoke camaraderie in the VW world.

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Article Body:

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If you're not from rural America, you probably do not realize that in small towns or on American Indian lands, people still greet each other by waving or raising their hand off the steering wheel for a second. If you are from a more rural environment, the crowded city is a Crocodile Dundee-type culture shock. There are exceptions however. Ever noticed how motorcycle riders acknowledge each other on the road? No matter if the rider is a lifelong Harley dude, a Gold Wing cruiser, a newby, or a grizzled veteran, they all lower a hand toward the road to say "hey" when another motorcycle passes in the opposite direction. Big rig truckers have more communication signals than some people's vocabulary. The road has become a permanent fixture in American culture with a continuously expanding language, unique customs, and growing citizenry (yes, many people have actually given up their land-bound homes to live on the road).

So what, you say? While as a person who has studied communication extensively, I find this phenomenon fascinating. It speaks to a bond and shared subcultures that transcend, if only momentarily, the pervasive divisions of economic status, race, gender, geography, and age. As a strengths-based practitioner, I think simple salutations have within them a certain power that might be harnessed in other ways.

As a long time Volkswagen owner, I have a proposal. First let me outline a couple of assumptions. Based on my own admittedly biased perspective I am asserting that most VW owners are better than average drivers with a high degree of alertness, a value of safety features, and an appreciation for smart,

responsive engineering (word to the insurance companies). We like enjoying our music, asserting our individuality, and finding ways to cleverly comment on societal inconsistencies via bumper stickers, even if they are sometimes taped in the window to preserve the paint job. VW owners also seem to be more likely to go hiking or engage in other outdoor pursuits (according to a recent VW commercial, not my own habits) and I also think they tend to be a peace-loving people, regardless of political party affiliation.

Thus, I think we should start greeting each other on the road with a peace sign. It doesn't have to be flashy—just two fingers raised in a V on the steering wheel will do (is it a coincidence that the peace sign is a "V"? I think not). If you feel exuberant, stick your hand up out of your sun roof. On a motorcycle it is generally the driver who makes the sign, but in a car you can have more people participate much in the way "slug bug" games used to preoccupy my youth. Having more drivers on the lookout for peace, sending peace as a message, and promoting peace in a humorous way will likely have a much greater impact than angry epitaphs aimed at the government. It will raise positive endorphins, increase a sense of community, and make people smile, which as research has shown is good for your mental (and physical) health.

So, VW drivers, unite! Hippies, yuppies, anarchists, skaters, skiers, bikers, cyclists, church ladies, diplomats, however you see yourself and whoever you are! If you're VW owner and a biker, you can add one more thing to your repertoire. If you're also a trucker, you will soon be even more of a virtuoso on the road.

This simple practice can remind us of how many people in the world just want to live in peace, chill out with their homies, and jam to some tunes. By constantly putting off peace in our personal life and our own communities, we are not changing the world for the better to the highest degree that we can because we are wasting the potential of our collective habits. Let's try being creatively peaceful every day. It's not really that complicated. Then, should push come to shove, we'll be alert, healthy peacemongers in fast cars.

Peace, out. V.