

# AutoSunday

AC systems often fail as the sun beats down

With the onset of this hot weather, we have had many calls for air conditioning that does not cool. With these extreme temperatures, the air conditioning system needs to be in optimal condition to produce the cold air out the ducts that you desire.

The most common cause of poor air conditioning performance is low refrigerant in the system due to some type of a leak.



Doug McAllister  
Under the hood

Sometimes these leaks can be very minute, and what we call a seasonal leak. This is where over a period of years the refrigerant escapes slowly to the point that all of a sudden one day the air conditioning is not cooling. In this case, an evacuation and recharging of the system is all that is necessary to get it working properly again.

If there was a leak that occurred that allowed all the refrigerant to escape, this needs to be tracked down and repaired before the system is recharged. The leak can be detected with either an electronic leak detector and/or fluorescent dye that is injected into the system that will show up at the leak sight. Potential leak areas could be any of the hoses, a condenser, an evaporator or the compressor.

There are other potential reasons why an air conditioning system may not be functioning besides low refrigerant. We had a Chevy Uplander in the shop the other day that had no cold air coming out of the vents even though we made sure the system was fully charged with refrigerant. It turned out we needed to perform a blend door relearn procedure.

This was accomplished by interfacing our scan tool with the HVAC module. The moral of the story is the fix for an inoperative air conditioning system is not always as simple as putting more refrigerant in. Even the air conditioning is controlled by a computer in many of today's cars.

**Maintenance tip**

It's vacation time folks. It happens every year that I will get a phone call from a good customer and the conversation will go something like this:

Good Customer: "Hi Doug, It's Mr. Good Customer. I was wondering if I could bring my car in to get it checked for our vacation."

Doug: "Sure, I'd love to check that out for you. When are you leaving?"

Good Customer: "We're leaving tomorrow afternoon."

Doug: Gulp! Knowing my schedule is packed, I say "Sure, bring it in and we'll check it out for you." Meanwhile I'm thinking to myself, I sure hope this car doesn't need anything major done to it!

While this scenario seems funny and far fetched, it is not. This happens multiple times every year. My suggestion to the motoring public is to plan a week or two ahead of your vacation to allow for scheduling and to allow for any unforeseen mechanical needs that may show up on your inspection.

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Just how car crazy is a guy who owns a warehouse full of Porsches?

By JASON STEIN  
Wheelbase Communications

Jerry Seinfeld loves Porsches. No, actually, he adores them. He craves them. He aches and yearns for all 46 or so of them he owns.

Seinfeld, the popular comedian and former star of his longtime, self-titled TV sitcom, even has a word for the disease.

**Pro-Files**

Automotive heroes and legends

"Porschephile," he once said in an interview with Automobile magazine.

Not that there's anything wrong with that.

The fact is, Seinfeld is only supporting an addiction every car lover would love to be able to afford. And it's a serious fixation.

In his private collection, Seinfeld owns a \$700,000 Porsche 959, one of only 300 or so ever built, as well as a 1959 16-cylinder GT speedster, a 911S from the 1971 movie "Le Mans," and one of 40 1955 Spyder 550s, the same model and pearl-gray color actor James Dean was driving when he crashed and died in 1955. And then there's the 10 Boxsters that are reportedly all painted different colors.

"Cool is what sells sports cars," Seinfeld wrote once in Automobile, trying to explain the Porsche mystique. "Why is this company so cool? Can you name another company in the history of companies that could get a positive PR spin off (from Dean's death)?"

He has a point and he's not afraid to show it.

When Seinfeld married wife Jessica in 1999, he gave her a \$40,000 1958 Porsche 1600 Speedster as a wedding gift.

But the trail of money doesn't end there.

Seinfeld spent five years and almost \$1.4 million turning an abandoned New York City plumbing and heating warehouse into his own private garage. It can hold up to 20 vehicles on white floors covered in Italian tile. The "garage" was also designed to include a playroom with a big-screen TV and a pool table as well as stainless-steel appliances.

Walk down 83rd Street on Manhattan's Upper West Side and you could practically miss the building. But, then, that's the point.

Seinfeld is an intensely private guy who doesn't make his passion public too often.

He has been obsessed with German cars for years. As a struggling comic, his first car was a 1977 Volkswagen Beetle, a vehicle that has been on display at a car museum in South Deerfield, Mass.

But it has been all Porsche ever since.

In his production office at NBC, Seinfeld kept several miniature Porsches on display and would obsessively document the maintenance record of all of his vehicles on a wall chart. Next to the chart was a framed "Le Mans" movie poster with actor Steve McQueen in the 911S, one Seinfeld's favorite vehicles.

Seinfeld has occasionally written columns for different automotive publications

and even took up an offer from Automobile magazine to drive a \$450,000, 604-horsepower Porsche Carrera GT on a press trip in Germany.

"It was the most incredible thing that has ever happened to me in my life except for my family," he told Automobile. "It was amazing. It was unbelievable."

It was a trip he just had to make.

One of his biggest disappointments, however, is not being allowed to drive his ultraexpensive 959, a model that is not certified for legal use in the United States. The 959 has never been tested by the U.S. government to determine emissions and crash-test standards because Porsche refused to deliver four vehicles for destruction tests. Therefore, Seinfeld had to import the vehicle under an "exhibition-only" clause.

Still, Seinfeld finds a way to love what he drives.

He occasionally gets away from New York by ringing out one of the Porsches on Connecticut's back roads.

But he occasionally causes a stir as well. Once, Seinfeld brought traffic to a halt at a Park Avenue dealership where he bought a Mercedes E-60. The police had to call in extra officers to settle the crowds down as Seinfeld rolled away in the \$138,000 car.

It's a safe bet another Porsche won't be far behind.

Not that there's anything wrong with that, either.

• E-mail Jason Stein at [www.wheelbase.ws/mailbag.html](mailto:www.wheelbase.ws/mailbag.html).



GREG PERRY/  
Wheelbase Communications

# jerry seinfeld

## Volkswagen adds a minivan to its U.S. offerings

By ANN M. JOB  
For The Associated Press

You can't blame Volkswagen officials and dealers for wanting to retain every buyer they can, including families that want a minivan.

So VW added a family friendly minivan, the 2009 Routan, to its lineup in relatively quick fashion — by getting Chrysler to build a version of the front-wheel drive Dodge Grand Caravan and Chrysler Town & Country vans for the German auto company.

The deal makes the VW Routan a roomy minivan with an assortment of storage spots and cubbies inside, easy entry and exit, above-the-pavement seat positions and many, but not all, of the features found in Chrysler's vans. It also means the Routan earned five out of five stars in federal government frontal and side crash testing — the same rating as the Chrysler minivans.

Volkswagen did make some changes, modifying the front and rear styling of Chrysler's vehicles, improving the seats, interior door trim and dashboard, and tuning the suspension a bit for tighter handling. It also took only the two top Chrysler V-6 gasoline engines for the Routan, not the lower-powered, 3.3-liter V-6 that's found in the base Grand



COURTESY OF VOLKSWAGEN

For the first time in years, Volkswagen is again selling a van in the United States, the 2009 Routan.

Caravan and Town & Country.

The Routan's starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, of \$25,950 for a 197-horsepower model with six-speed automatic transmission undercuts the top-selling minivan, the Honda Odyssey, by \$1,075.

But the Odyssey, which starts at \$27,025 for a base 2009 model, comes with a V-6 that puts out considerably more power — 244 horses — while retaining a fuel economy rating that's the same or better than the lower-powered base Routan.

The Routan's starting price also is just \$645 more than a base 2009 Dodge Grand Caravan with 175-horsepower V-6.

Most people apparently don't know about VW's new van. No one gave the Routan any attention during the test drive.

The exterior shape is typical minivan, with the most unexpected element outside being the big VW badge on the middle of the attractive grille. It has been years since VW had a van in the United States.

Confirming the Routan's small mark in the market, sales in the United States so far total only 4,553 in the model year that began last fall. In contrast, Honda sells some 6,000 Odysseys in this country every month.

Still, the test Routan, a mid-range SE, was a comfortable

people and cargo carrier. Everyone had adequate head- and legroom and cargo space was generous.

I especially appreciated that there was no liftover at the rear cargo floor, so I didn't have to hoist heavy suitcases very far off the pavement. Total cargo room with second- and third-row seats folded down is on par with other minivans at just over 140 cubic feet.

Interior dimensions, such as third-row headroom of 37.9 inches, are mostly the same as in Chrysler's vans. But slightly different front styling and seats lead to a tad less front-seat headroom of 37.2 inches, instead of the 39.8 inches in a Chrysler van.

The Routan's seats look and feel different from a Chrysler. The upholstery on the test van was a functional, gray textured style expected in a German van, not an American one.

Seat support was firm, not mushy, like it always is in a VW, and kept me comfortable throughout a three-hour drive. The dashboard has typical VW no-nonsense style and easy-to-read gauges and controls. But the swiveling second-row seats and table available in Chrysler's minivans are not on the Routan option list.

Engine power came on easily in city traffic and on flat roads, and the transmission

**At a glance**

Price as tested: \$30,450

Engine: 3.8-liter, overhead valve V-6

City/highway fuel economy: 16/23 miles per gallon

Length: 202.5 inches

Wheelbase: 121.2 inches

Curb weight: 4,507 pounds

Built: Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

Destination charge: \$750

worked smoothly. But I felt the transmission seeking gears on hilly roads, and I readily heard the engine working as the van tried to keep its speed on uphill climbs.

The Routan's ride and handling seem just a tad tighter, more managed than that of Chrysler's vans. Among the suspension updates are stiffer springs and dampers, but the van still has a big, nearly 17-foot-long body and a lot of weight that needs to be controlled.

VW buffs may recall the company showed a concept VW Microbus at the auto show in Detroit earlier this decade. But low sales projections and limited appeal have kept a new Microbus on the drawing boards.