

## THE LITTLE CAR THAT COULD

There have been many memorable visitors to the Assembly Hall (better known to pre-1969 alumni as the Chapel), but for members of the class of '57, one in particular stands out: the brief onstage appearance, one April night during their senior year, of a faculty member's brand-new Volkswagen. The visit was made possible by a group of enterprising student pranksters, who, according to an account in the April 20, 1957 issue of *The Exonian*, carried the car "from beside Soule Hall around in back of Abbot, up the path by the Academy Building, through the front door, and up the left-hand stairs leading to chapel about 9 o'clock Wednesday evening."

As part of their upcoming 50th reunion, the class of '57 has published a first-person account of that memorable night in their reunion book. Thanks to author Dave Duval '57 and reunion book editor Kirk Avent '57, we're pleased to share this inside look at one of the more spectacular pranks in Academy history—and its unexpected aftermath.

My memory is somewhat foggy, but I did help carry the Volkswagen up the steps of the Academy Building. The car was about two inches too wide to get through the main doors, so two people stood on others' shoulders to get the door off. They used a pair of pliers and a hammer to get the pins out.

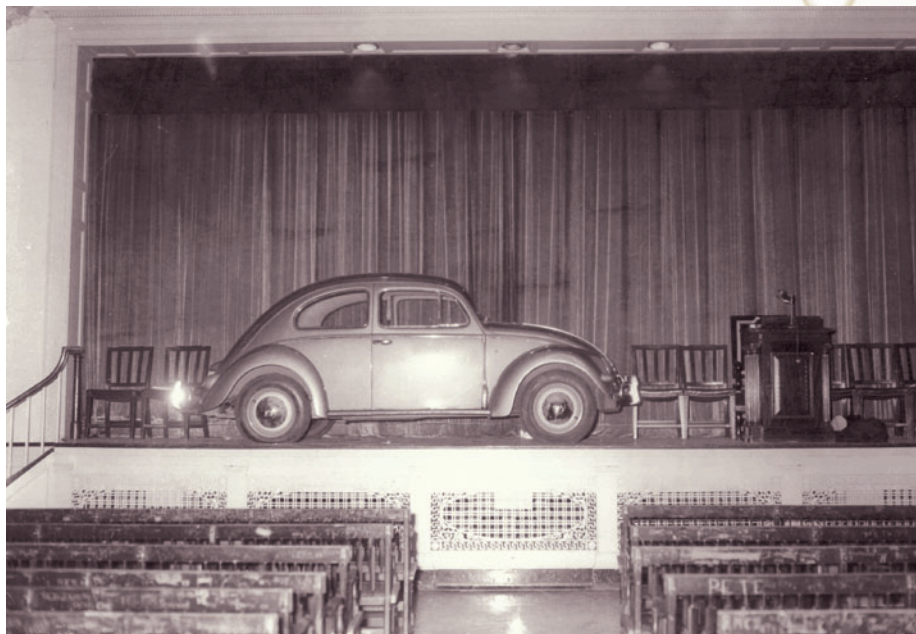
Inside, we carried it up the stairs to the left because Mr. Gropp was conducting a make-up German class on the second floor, at the top of the stairs to the right. He was hard of hearing, so he didn't hear us getting the car up the stairs, but certainly the boys in that classroom knew something was going on. We got the VW up onto the stage. We knew the next morning at chapel that either the car would be sitting there in the middle of the stage or the curtains would be shut, hiding the car from view. Either way, we would be laughing.

But when we put the door downstairs back on, it was sprung. Later the night watchman had trouble locking the door. He just happened to be there, trying to fix the door, when a stringer from one of the Boston papers [who had been alerted by an Exeter student] showed up and said, "I hear you have a car up there on the stage." The night watchman called the dean of students [Robert Kesler], who rounded up enough faculty to pick the car up and carry it back downstairs. They did not remove the Academy Building door, but just squeezed the car through, so they caused some damage.

We walked into chapel the next morning with big grins on our faces. There was the stage, full of faculty—and no car. Most mornings, there weren't that many faculty in chapel, but that morning they were *all* there, sitting there grinning at us. It was the most wonderful turnabout. We were flabbergasted. The faculty took the whole thing in stride.

I don't think anyone got in trouble. The car belonged to a German teacher, Valentine Bosetto. There weren't many Volkswagen bugs around then, and his may have been the first in Exeter. Most of the inspiration and manpower came out of *The Exonian* and PEAN offices.

The '57 reunion book also includes an *Exonian* article describing the subsequent lively debate at Student Council "about who should pay for the damage done to the Volkswagen," which totaled \$40. "It was finally decided to place a collection box in the P.O. lobby and let students contribute what they wish," the article states. "Mr. Kesler warned the council that paying for the car might give the impression that the council would pay for any and all pranks students execute. 'If anybody gets another idea like that, we'll pay,' enthused Jack Watkins."



*Fifty years ago this month, members of the class of '57 carried a faculty member's car through the front door of the Academy Building, up the marble steps and onto the stage of the chapel.*