

How To Speak Smartly About Beautiful Cars, Like The Volkswagen Arteon



Even as it hits Canada, the Volkswagen Arteon already has won awards for its unique style. A blend of four-door sedan, hatchback and sport-car cues, the Arteon looks like no other vehicle on the road, and its role as the flagship of Volkswagen in Canada suggests where the brand's future designs will evolve.

There may be no more challenging job in the automotive world than designing a vehicle. It's not just taking a blueprint of a chassis from engineers and making it look pretty. It requires blending art, customer tastes and societal cues – and anticipating how the final result will resonate years into the future. Bold yet timeless design has been one of Volkswagen's strengths for decades and, as the Arteon shows, will remain one for years to come.

Yet even car experts struggle sometimes to say what exactly it is that makes one car attractive and another ... not so much. Here's a short glossary of automotive design terms that can help you pinpoint what's turns your head on the road:

A-Line: If you traced a vehicle's silhouette from front to rear, you'd have the A-line, or main profile. This line often defines the entire character of a car, and a few millimeters here and there can mean the difference between sleek or dull.



Beltline: The horizontal line that divides the sheetmetal from the glass in a vehicle. Just as a higher or lower beltline on a human body drastically alters a person's look, the height of a vehicle's beltline can make it look sporty and menacing or welcoming and airy. In the Arteon, the beltline is balanced for a classical feel.



20-inch wheels shown limited and later availability.

Character Line: The creases running horizontally along the side of the vehicle that give it a visual definition. "We have a line," says Klaus Bischoff, Volkswagen Head of Design, "that runs through the entire car and brings the volume of the Arteon even closer to the ground. This line starts in the radiator grille at the front and runs cleanly over the side profile and into the tail lights." At the rear, it develops into a sharp undercut, which visually reduces the height of the Arteon and carries the strong shoulder section upwards.

C-Pillar: Car designers have a lettering system for the pillars that contain the passenger compartment when viewed from the side; the A-pillar frames the front, the B-pillar is where the door edges meet, and the C-pillar frames the rear side windows. Over time the C-pillars and the angle formed where the sheetmetal and glass meet have become brand touchstones for several automakers and key models — few more so than the Volkswagen Golf. In the Arteon, the C-pillar follows the long arch of the rear hatch, ending in a discreet angle with a premium touch of glass and chrome.



Down the Road Graphics: If you've ever tried to identify a car at night simply from the shape of its headlights, you've memorized what designers call "down the road graphics." With the arrival of LED daytime running lights, there are more ways than ever to distinguish vehicles through light. The Arteon makes the most of this with its dramatic light signature of the daytime running light that angles into the grille, framing the LED headlights.



Fastback: The car body term dates back to before World War II, when automakers first began optimizing aerodynamics. Long roofs that slope down to a car's trunk provide several aerodynamic benefits, and eventually such profiles were called fastbacks. The fastback shape of the Arteon gives it a dynamic and elegant look among midsize sedans.

Flitzer: The German term for the side badge on Volkswagens where the front door line meets the fender.



Color shown limited availability

Greenhouse / Day Light Opening (DLO): The shape and total area of the glass around a passenger compartment in a vehicle. Owners generally favour open, airy greenhouses, but too much glass can make for awkward exterior design. Sports cars often have the smallest DLOs that emphasize performance at the expense of visibility. The best designs offer a balance between extremes, while panoramic sunroofs such as the one in the Arteon, add a further dimension.

Joint Line: Any place on a vehicle where two body panels meet. Joint lines are rarely the centrepiece of a vehicle's design, but they can add or detract greatly from the overall impression. The joint line where the hood of the Arteon meets the front wheelarch shows how graceful such seams can be.



20-inch wheels shown limited and later availability.



Overhang: As seen from the side, the part of the car that extends ahead and behind of the wheelarches. Classic cars commonly had a foot or two of sheetmetal and frame sticking out in front and back. In the modern era, smaller overhangs have become the more preferred style (and provide more assured handling, as more of the vehicle's weight lies within the wheelbase.)

Power Dome: A term for a hood bulge that gives the impression of power underneath. Once quite common, the industry has been moving toward flatter hoods (or even slightly hoods for electric vehicles.) In the Arteon, there's only a hint of a power dome; instead, the "clamshell" hood creates its unusual look by stretching the entire width of the car, folding down at the edges to the wheelarch.

Rake: The angle of the windshield as seen from the side of the car. The Volkswagen Beetle was a good example of a vehicle with almost no windshield rake. Modern vehicles have more rake for lower wind noise and better aerodynamics, although glare can be an issue at too great an angle.



Shoulder: The side curve of a vehicle body, typically above the wheels. Many vehicles lack shoulders entirely, as the roof and sides meet in one

continuous line. On the Arteon, its shoulders create one of its most distinctive features around the rear fender and hatch.



Track: The width between the wheels. Narrower cars have better aerodynamics, but wider vehicles look more premium. Much of the design of the Arteon emphasizes its width, from the flowing horizontal brightwork in the grille to the taillights and seamless, one-piece hatch.

Tumblehome: A nautical term that describes the inward angle of the greenhouse. Pickups, vans and many SUVs have zero to little tumblehome to optimize interior space (and because looking “blocky” can be a virtue.) Just the right amount of tumblehome can be the difference between an attractive design and a competent, but boring, one.

Wedge: The horizontal angle at which a car sits when viewed from the side. Minivans have zero wedge; drag racers have extreme wedge. The Arteon adds to its overall sport-inspired design with a slight wedge body that rises along its entire length.

Wheelarch Gap: The space between the wheel and the body. It’s a particular obsession for many auto fans, with a whole enthusiast community devoted to “slammed” cars that have no gap at all. Trucks and off-road SUVs require more gap, but even in those types of vehicles designers work to ensure the body still provides an aesthetically pleasing space. With the R-Line’s optional 20-inch wheels*, the stance of the Arteon carries only a modest gap.

**Exterior color options will vary based on model, trim level, and package combination and may increase price. Special order colors subject to additional delivery time. See dealer for details.*