

SNOW TRAC

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before. Lyndon Strother, of the ST4 Owners Club, was on hand, and gave me a quick tour and history lesson.

The first Snow Tracs were made in 1957 (makes them *vintage* in my book), but only four were produced, and they probably don't exist anymore because they were used mostly by ski resorts, to groom the slopes, and northern utilities companies, to service the back areas. These vehicles were usually driven till they died, although Lyndon says there are a lot of the later models still in service at resorts all across North America and Europe. The next year, 1958, production jumped to 75 units, and it fluctuated as high as 200 units in 1964. By the end of 1981 over 2000 had been produced.

Built in Sweden, these vehicles have an aluminum body and steel tube chassis. They utilize a VW industrial engine mounted backwards, up front. A VW transmission is used to deliver power to the crawler tracks. The vehicle is 12 feet long, 75 inches wide, weighs 3000 pounds, and goes about 20 miles an hour.

What's really cool about these Snow Tracs is that you steer these track-driven snow machines by holding on to a black three spoke steering wheel, originally made for either a Kübelwagen or early Standard Beetle. The company that designed and built these machines was AB Westeras-maskiner, pronounced "Vesterhoss machiner," which means Hilltop or Ridgetop Machine Works. Sounds like an off-road outfit to me. Lyndon says they tried to use every available VW part they could find, and a lot of it was "war surplus." The taillights are the same as a '46 VW (of course there are probably more Snow Tracs than '46 Splits left out there). The Snow Trac also used genuine VW brakes, wiper motors, switches, gauges, knobs and latches.

A VW transaxle is also used, with modified axles to drive the tracks. The steering is connected to the axles via an ingenious device called variator. There are two vertical shafts that run off a beveled gear on the end of each axle and have a variable-width pulley on top. The two pulleys are connected with a large belt. When the operator turns the steering wheel, the pulley to the inside enlarges and the pulley on the outside gets smaller, causing the inside track to go slower and the outside track to go faster, and bingo ... it turns. Not too sharp though, I imagine it took a little getting used to.

Lyndon and his fellow club members operate Snow Tracs all over the Northwest, Canada and Alaska, and Lyndon has lots of stories about back country adventures to places where it is so cold that if you step outside and throw your coffee up in the air, it freezes before it hits the ground. No thanks Lyndon, but if you ever have one down around Lake Tahoe, let me know. ●