

**Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Research Focus Day,**  
**University of Worcester, 16 March 2005**

**Jekyll and Hyde: The Forgotten History of the VW Beetle**

Despite the cute and “loveable” image of the VW Beetle, the history of the *Volkswagen* is inextricably linked to the development and perpetuation of National Socialism. It is this fact that is so often forgotten, or perhaps even unknown, about this otherwise well-known car. Discussion begins with a brief look at the ideas that prompted the development of the ‘People’s Car’ and the ideas/ideals behind it, especially the ‘Strength through Joy’ (*Kraft durch Freude*) movement. The VW was publicized and promoted with all the power and skill of the Nazi propaganda machine and the VW was a showpiece of its achievements as the auto industry would be an engine to drive the nation and the people out of the Great Depression. The *Volkswagen* was commissioned by Adolf Hitler and was in fact a pet project of his. In the end the *Volkswagen* not only served a dual purpose of fulfilling a socio-economic utopian idea and providing finance for the *Reich*, but it also had dual practical functions. In civilian form it promised motoring for the masses and in military form it carried German soldiers to the front and had other military potentialities. Production was also closely related to the worst policies of the regime and the VW factory (*Volkswagenwerke*) not only used foreign prisoners, but also had its own concentration camp, Laagberg. It is estimated that a total of 5,000 concentration camp prisoners performed forced labour at VW during the war.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most surprising conclusion, however, is that if you ever wanted to own a Porsche, you should buy a VW Beetle!!

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<sup>1</sup> Place of Remembrance of Forced Labor in the Volkswagen Factory, Wolfsburg: Volkswagen AG, 1999.