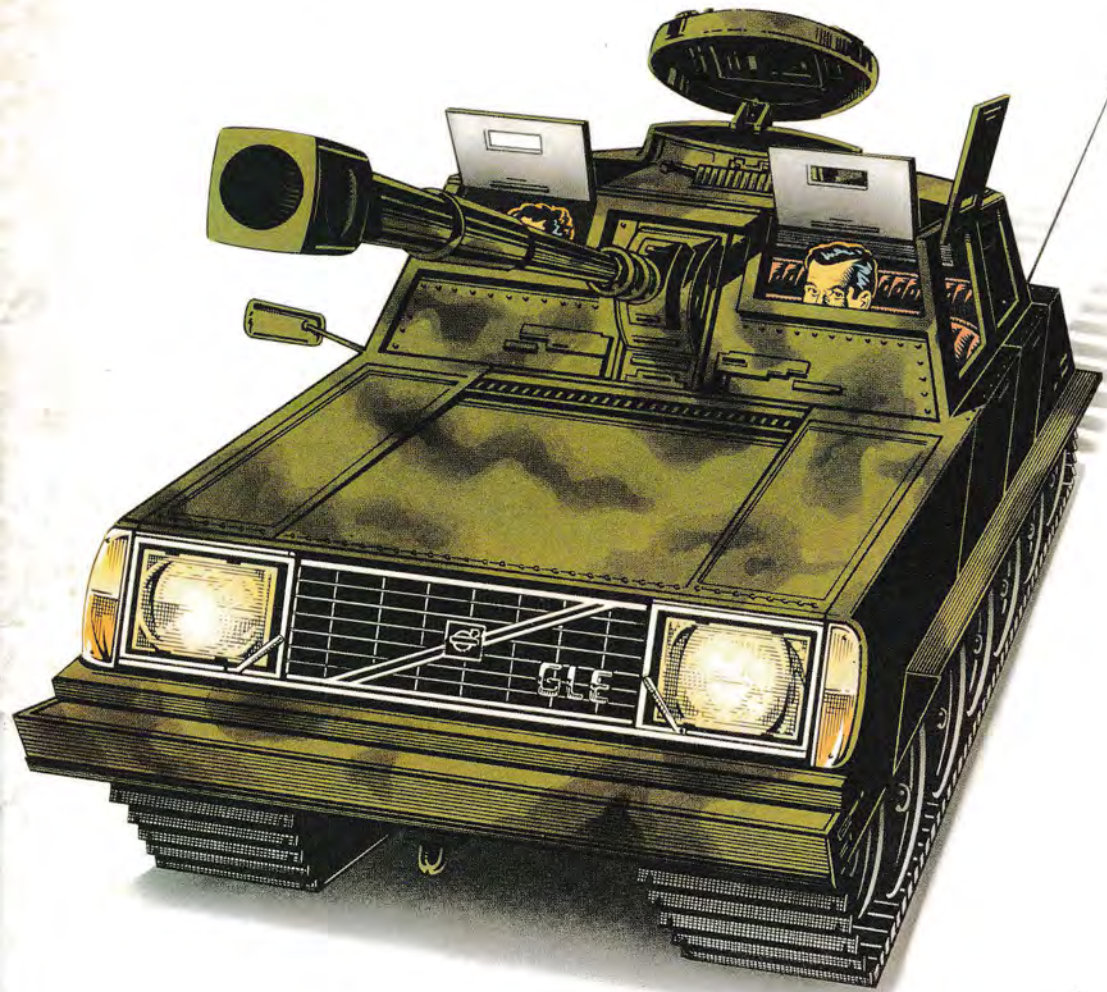




THERE ARE SOME UGLY RUMOURS FLOATING ABOUT







'BUILT LIKE A TANK, LOOKS LIKE A TANK, DRIVES LIKE A TANK!'

There was a time when even we would admit that a Volvo was a bit of a tank to drive. Safe, but boring.

Times have changed.

In fact, the new Volvo 200 Series have exceptional steering, suspension and braking systems. The result of a multi-million pound investment in research and development.

It means that today's Volvo is as superb to handle as it is safe, comfortable and reliable, with a specification that makes the 1980 models amazing value.

To drive home the facts, we invited every UK motoring journalist who tested a new Volvo to test an old model first and compare the two.

This is what they said.

It's a V-day for Volvo.



Volvo 'tank' that changed its ways

YOU COULD CALL them Tank and Super-Tank – a brace of Volvos of similar proportions separated in age by five years and in mileage covered by a distance almost equal to three times round the world. I spent a substantial part of a recent summer holiday driving them successively at the invitation of Volvo Concessionaires over some favourite Scottish routes.

With the passing of time, the Volvo 144 has become the 244. It has retained the same basic body shell – which also serves for the six-cylinder 260 Volvo series – but it has changed in many ways, not least in its handling. The big Volvo's reputation for being tank-like was not based merely on the solidity and daunting appearance of its bodywork. It was also heavy in its steering and needed a braking pedal pressure calculated to develop the leg muscles.

These were the most immediately obvious differences apparent when switching from the 144 (which, despite its 87,000 miles on the clock, was in remarkably good condition) to the 244. The braking response was so much quicker and, with its

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J. C. BOWMAN



power assistance effortless, and the steering not only much lighter but more accurate, that these things alone transformed the car.

There have been many other changes, however. With its aggressively forward-jutting front end and heavy impact-absorbent bumpers, the latest version of the Volvo is possibly more tank-like than ever, but in a more modern way. Oblong halogen headlights cleaned by a wash/wipe system replace the old round-eyed ones. The engine is more powerful and makes less fuss and suspension changes – which involve increased roll stiffness – add subtly to the safety and predictability of the car.

Safety has long been a Volvo fetish. The company were the first in the world to fit seat-belts in their cars. They are now the inertia-reel type and dashboard warning flashes and clicks disapprovingly if you omit to fasten

them. The older car had static belts, untidier and more restrictive.

For slickness of gear change, the well-worn model had it; – just; but the 244 GL has a new feature. Overdrive is standard and it is operated by a switch on the gear lever knob. With some cars, you have to use the clutch to smooth out the change, but the Volvo's overdrive top could be switched in or out without resorting to such dodges. Used on suitable occasions – and there are plenty of them – overdrive cuts down on engine noise, wear-and-tear and, of course, fuel consumption.

Another of the refinements that is standard on the 1979 Volvos is a warning buzzer which operates when the driver's door is open with the headlights on, or if the key is left in the ignition. It minimises one or two of the risks which can land careless motorists in awkward situations.



MOTORING

Gentle Volvo

By STUART MARSHALL

VOLVO CARS, as I am not infrequently assured by people who may have last sat in one six or seven years ago, look like tanks, are built like tanks and drive like tanks.

I am the first to admit that the styling of a 244 saloon is more like that of an armoured fighting vehicle than an Italian supercar. There is no question that Volvos are strongly built to protect their occupants in a crash and to last for a long time. But do they drive like tanks?

Not any more they don't. The first Volvo 144, which came on the scene nearly 13 years ago, was a hobnailed boot of a car. It was strong and long suffering, but it was clumsy to drive, with heavy steering and inelegant handling. Having said all that, it was a good car to be in when north of the arctic circle in mid winter when it went better in deep snow and on ice than many a sprightlier rival.

The present 244 looks much the same from the windscreen pillars backwards as the earlier 144 but appearances mislead. When it got its bulldozer-blade front end five years ago the old front suspension was replaced by McPherson struts and the worm-and-nut steering by rack-and-pinion. And the old



Volvos old and new compared. The looks do not change much, but every year in every way the car gets better.

overhead valve engine gave way to an overhead camshaft version.

Since then, the programme of making small but significant improvements annually has continued because Volvo could not afford to throw away the existing body shell even if they wanted to. The result is that the 1979 Volvo 244, though it may be difficult to tell at a glance even from a 1974 model, is a better car than its forebears in every important respect.

Volvo chose to demonstrate this to me by asking me to drive first a well worn 1973 model for a few days and then switch to the latest 244 GLE. For a car with 110,000 miles on the odometer (it will go up to 999,999 miles) the "M" registered 144 looked in good shape. The dark green paint was glossy; the fuel injected engine felt vigorous; and there were no creaks or rattles (or obvious signs of rust) in the

body.

The gearshift was heavy by present-day standards; the steering needed a lot of effort at low speeds and the engine was noisy at motorway speeds cruising rates. Even so, it was a car I would have filled up with people and luggage and driven up to Scotland, confident of getting there and back quickly and not uncomfortably.

Turning it in for a 244 GLE after a couple of hundred miles, the first thing I noticed was the lighter – and power assisted – steering; the sharper steering response due to 70 series steel radial tyres; and the generally nimbler handling on winding roads, with far less roll.

Clutch action was lighter and the new gearbox with British-made overdrive reduced engine noise to a whisper at 65-70 mph, though there was an unfortunate exhaust resonance when accelerating between 3,000 and 4,000 rpm – say 45

and 60 mph in third gear – which could be felt as well as heard.

It impressed me as much more of a driver's car than the old one. My wife, who had always thought of Volvos as "men's cars," said she felt at home in the 244 GLE within seconds of taking the wheel and was astonished in its light, lively behaviour.

I would not put forward a Volvo as an ideal car for the motorist who covets a Jaguar or a BMW for example. It still has no sporting pretensions. But the motorist who would dearly love (but cannot afford) to have one of the least expensive Mercedes will find the Volvo has something of the German car's strong, well engineered feel about it, even if the non-independent rear suspension does not give so good a ride. As a consolation, the Volvo's seats are softer and, to my taste, more comfortable.

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IF A CAR gets off on the wrong footing, that first impression sticks and it takes a long time — if ever — for the true merits of the model to get through. One frequent theme of conversations I have with keen motorists is their enthusiasm for the Renault 16 — which, almost incredibly, has now been with us for 14 years. A nice car, sure, and adaptable too.

“Why can't Britain make a car like that?” they ask me. In vain I point out that we do, that we have been making it for ten years and that its seating is, if anything, more versatile than the Renault. And that it, too, has a five-speed box which is not solely the prerogative of flash Continentals. And that it is several hundred pounds cheaper.

Faces fall when you say that you are talking about the Maxi. “Oh that — got a bad gear-change hasn't it?” Well, it used to have but has no longer. And in spite of its price advantage, the Maxi has only just scraped into the top ten sellers for the past three years or so. But that first impression went sour and the car and Austin Morris have suffered ever since. Unjustly.

Another bit of bar folklore: Vauxhalls rust. Well, they used to — and it has been an uphill job for the Luton makers to erase that image. I think they have succeeded now and have one of the best model ranges they have ever had — one totally competitive with any other volume manufacturer: the sales figures are a fair indication of this regained confidence.

Japanese cars come fitted with everything you can think of . . . really? A few years ago perhaps; but the specification of most run-of-the-mill family cars made in Britain



Roy Harry on injustices ca

And now th

is now very high and the gap, if any, between us and the Eastern invaders is very narrow.

Volvo: built like a tank, handles like a tank — that's the conventional thinking. The construction claim is about right but the handling of the current basic model is quite transformed from those earlier cars. Volvo's UK press officer had a bright idea recently and after booking a road test of the current 244 saloon I agreed that I should try a “well-used” predecessor —

a 1973 144 and the car had ch

Well-used in green saloon miles on the double the ave British motorist not an unusual owner. WBJ being used (and maintained) by dealers as a demo on loan to c own car was



Volvos old and new

used by motoring folk lore The good news

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such a succession of drivers and various techniques, the car will have had much more abuse than a private driver would inflict on his own property. It had also had its fair share of knocks provoking some body repairs — though the paintwork, apart from some bloom on the boot lid, was in exceptional order.

More significant was its mechanical state: in spite of its high mileage, the head had never been off nor had any work been neces-

sary on its gearbox. Apart from what the trade lovingly calls "normal service times" it had not needed any major overhaul: police forces running similar cars work on the basis of about 140,000 miles before the big bills could be expected to roll in (and then they put them on the market and buy new).

Volvos are never going to win any awards for being graceful, though to my eye the 144 is a better looking car than the shovel fronted model that has taken its place. But in every other way, the 244 is a transformation: it is no ball of fire but its 2.1 litre carburettor engine is smooth and delivers a steady surge of power throughout, though you will have to use the gearbox more often than you might think.

It is a heavy car and there are many times that you will find yourself down to second gear to keep the car moving. But the wider track, revised suspension and rack and pinion steering enable it to be hustled along: 58 non-motorway miles in under an hour on a busy Saturday to keep a lunch appointment in East Anglia proved to me that it will shift much quicker than you might expect from its appearance.

It is also quieter and has better visibility, not least now that Volvo have finally changed the wiper pattern to match right hand drive — something that many other importers should copy with urgency. The list of improvements on the 244 is lengthy and if the condition of the 144 is anything to go by, a Volvo should go on for quite some time, justifying the company's reputation for building sound and reliable cars.



Volvos, ancient and modern

"They don't make cars like they used to," is a remark that is often heard.

I have just been investigating the truth of the matter.

Volvo, in a novel experiment, let me drive one of their six-year-old Volkvos with nearly 100,000 miles on the clock and then I followed up with its modern equivalent, the 244 DL.

My conclusions are that if you are buying a car now, it is worth paying a bit more than you may be really able to afford and keep it for many years so that like an old shoe it suits you and wears well.

I couldn't find out about the detailed history of the old 144 Volvo except that it had only one owner, and no major repairs had been called for when Volvo acquired it.

Though getting in was more difficult with the heavy doors and little spring assistance once you were in, it welcomed you into club-like seats. There was a touch of nostalgia when I found the hand-brake on the right, snug and well down below seat level so that it wasn't in the way. Remember when that was the fashion? I

MOTORING MATTERS by Gerald Carr

wonder the safety-at-any-price beaurocrats don't get round to our present dangerously-sited hand-brake - a lump of metal that could catch a leg in an accident and which has so often been misused by youngsters.

Thank goodness Volvo still retain a similar dashboard and they write on the knobs what they will do. They believe their owners can read and are not illiterate symbolists.

People have described the old Volkvos as "tanks" But they were 100-200 lbs lighter than the present ones. So they made do with a 2-litre engine as against the present 2.1 litre. My wife was delighted with the mirror that popped up to make a mini-dressing table when the glove box was opened.

What about the driving and the ride which are, after all, the more important of car characteristics? It certainly had not got the response and even verve of the 1979 car which had only a mere 13,000 miles notched up.

The engine was livelier and more responsive. The 5-speed gearbox more flexible, I wouldn't have tried to press the oldie to exceed the speed limit in third. The ride was taut without being bouncy. But the oldie, in keeping with the character of its seating, rode with cushioned comfort without being flabby.

The modern car has a lighter and easier clutch. There was a long pedal movement on the 144 but nothing happened until the last half inch when it needed a little feathering. The power brakes were a bit stodgy compared with the modern ones that were easier to use. And there was the steering and the big wheel which perhaps could give rise to tank epithet.

Wings

Of course, the modern Volvo has a lot more in the way of new refinements and engineering improvements. Halogen headlamps with wiper-washers, low-profile tyres, a wider track, and many others.



FIVE YEARS ON THE ROAD



By Clive Birtwistle
Motoring Correspondent

WHAT is a car like after 100,000 miles? I have often wondered but my time is normally spent testing new cars.

As an unusual exercise, however, Volvo recently offered me the current 244 GL to be followed immediately by a 1973 144 with 108,000 miles behind it.

The object of the test was to impress me with the improvements; and indeed this was achieved, for there have been some significant developments in the past five years.

However, my experience with these cars goes back 15 years and I recall how disappointed I was with the 144 when it first came out.

One of the most attractive features of its predecessor, the 122, was the silky smooth steering. On my first long journey with the new 144 I felt thoroughly frustrated by the tiresomely heavy steering, heavy gear change and clutch and insensitive throttle.

Long before it had been dubbed a "tank" when it acquired massive bumpers, I thought it one of the most cumbersome vehicles on the road. But Volvo have always been a

firm noted for steady development on sound engineering lines.

The car improved gradually and the 1973 144 GL with Bosch fuel injection was considered quite a car in its day. It sold for £2,850, could do 104 mph and 0-60 in 10.3 seconds.

Even after 108,000 miles it continues to run well. There is some tappet noise and a harsh engine note under heavy acceleration, but it performs creditably.

Although the tick-over is set correctly, the engine tends to stall when the clutch pedal is let out, but this is a peculiarity to which a driver adjusts.

The gearchange is also heavy, although it still works effectively. Brakes are perfectly satisfactory. The steering is heavy and a little imprecise but improves with speed.

Inside, the cloth-faced seats have retained their resilience and still feel quite comfortable, but are nothing like as good as the current design with lumbar adjustment, heating, and height rake and reach adjustment. The

1973 seats were in a rather coarse cloth material.

All controls are still efficient, but the hand-brake requires a firm pull. Though similar to the present car, the heating on the 1973 model was far less powerful both in heat produced and ventilation. This could be due to a dirty cooling system.

Apart from one burn mark, trim, carpets and headlining showed little sign of age or wear, although the driving seat had been recovered. The boot is tidy and under-bonnet it is surprisingly clean.

Furthermore the retail value of the car is £1,900 - only £950 less than when new.

Yet there is no doubt of the improvements on the 1979 car. The GL, has a carburettor engine of larger capacity and develops 107 bhp, giving a top speed of 105 mph and 0-60 in 12.3 seconds.

And at 25 mpg it is fractionally more economical than the older fuel-injected car which

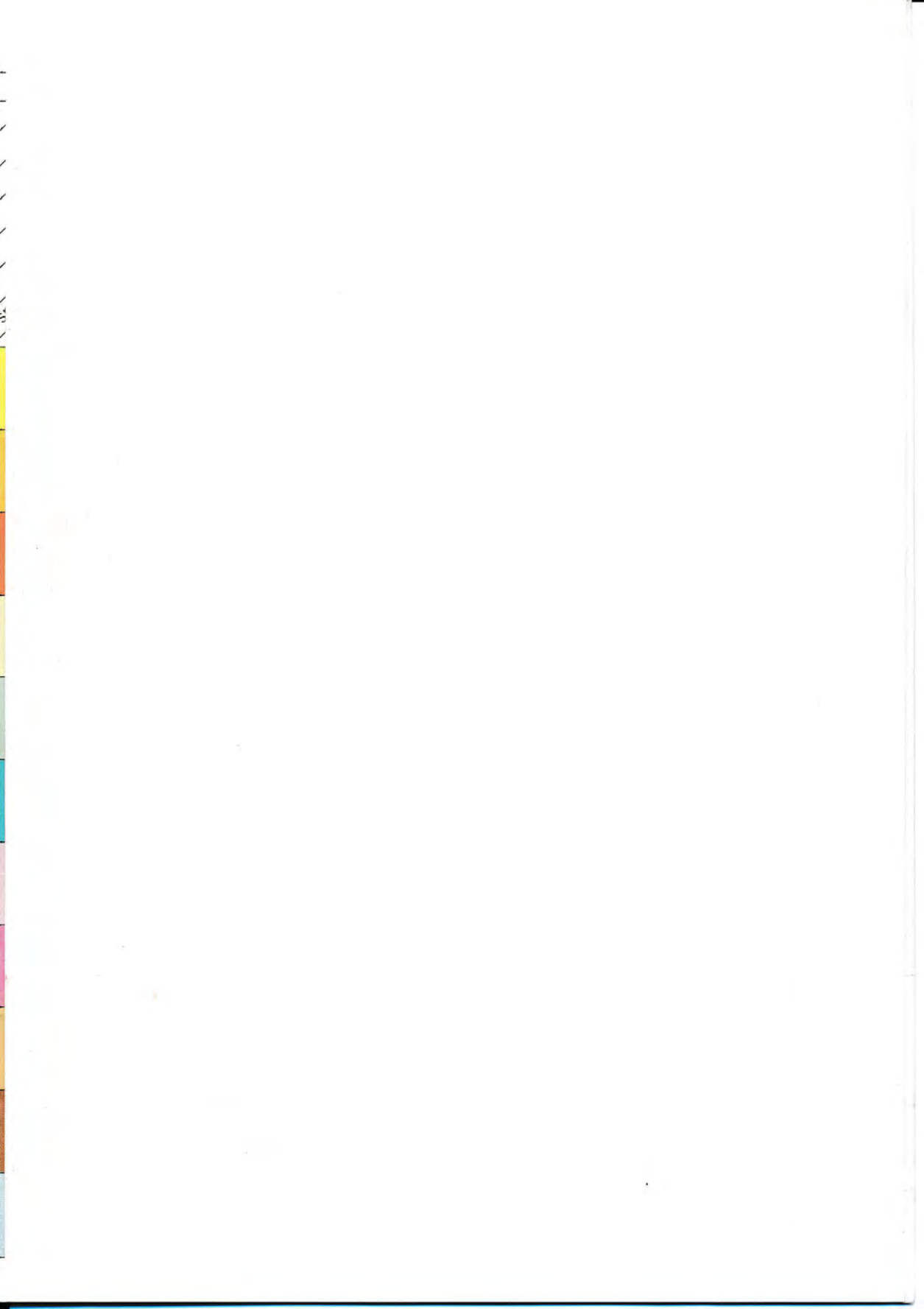
did 24 mpg. The steering is much more refined and lighter, the brakes a shade lighter to apply and more powerful, and the gearbox is effortless by comparison. Of course, the older car would have been sweeter in many respects when new.

The 1979 car is vastly more comfortable with its optional buttoned leather seats giving better all-round support with an easier posture behind the padded wheel. The older car had an ebony wheel which creaks (and I can remember those wheels creaking when new).

The new car is more handsome inside with its softer facia mouldings, more impressive instrument array and more stylish trim details and door padding. Ride, too, has been improved and - most important - the car has become quieter.

Five years development has certainly made a difference to the quality of the Volvo, but if it can match the durability of its predecessor it will be doing well.

	Fitted Carpets	Head Restraints—front	Seat Belts—front and rear	Safety cage construction	Luggage compartment	Laminated Screen	Halogen Headlights	Heated rear lighting	Seat belt reminder	Radial ply tyres	Interior adjustable door mirrors	Reversing lights	Glovebox lighting	Cigar Lighter	Clock
244 DL															
244 GL															
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