

A SWEDISH MYTH — COMPROMISED

**It's like discovering that Greta Garbo had freckles
— the Volvo 164 Automatic is superbly engineered
but small design oversights tend to mar the perfect image.**

THE LEGEND surrounding Volvo cars is held dear by the Swedish company. It has been carefully nurtured and cultivated until well-established in the minds of car connoisseurs everywhere.

And it is this legend — of durability, fine workmanship and inbuilt safety — that probably sells more Volvos than all the efforts of the company's salesmen.

Customers who buy on the strength of this reputation are completely justified. They will enjoy the world's most solid and durable motor car — the life expectancy of a Volvo is better than that of a Volkswagen and considerably better than that of a Mercedes-Benz.

At the same time, the Volvo customer will gain the benefits of inherent safety and security which is such an integral part of the Volvo character. He will also step into a motorised realm of comfort, roominess and distinguished, if conventional styling.

But although the Volvo is all of these things, and more, there is nonetheless a definite limit to the Volvo mystique.

I reached this conclusion after testing the six-cylinder 164 automatic. From an initial belief that the car would prove to be vastly superior to most other vehicles, I was gradually affected by a feeling of disillusionment.

I erroneously expected that, in addition to being a great example of high-grade engineering, the 164 would be an excellent driver's car — one that would lend genuine enjoyment to the often uninspiring task of motoring. But I was a little disappointed.

The 164 is a curious admixture of advanced design features punctuated by surprising lapses in detail planning. These minor failings in no way negate the integrity of the Volvo, but they do take the edge off one's initial willingness to be really impressed by the car.

It begins with wheel-trims that extend beyond the wheel-rim and offer themselves for sacrifice against concrete kerbs. It continues inside the car, where the adjusting handle for front-seat rake is tucked hard against the door pillar in such a way that it is almost impossible to operate. When one does gain a purchase on the lever it is so stiff in operation that a great amount of effort is needed to move it. In fact, my efforts resulted in the plastic handle-cover pulling away from the lever.

Once behind the un-necessarily large steering wheel, the driver is confronted by a

strip speedometer which proves difficult to read with any accuracy. The dashboard is covered in unbecoming false-wood laminate.

Heating and demisting controls consist of vertical wheels mounted in the centre of the dashboard. In the test car these were stiff, forcing the driver to concentrate unduly on their operation. The serrated edges on the wheels are extremely hard on the fingers.

To compound a dashboard layout that is far from efficient, the radio/tape player is mounted immediately in front of the passenger's seat, almost out of reach of the driver.

Should the driver wish to change stations or replace a cassette, he must lean well away from the steering wheel and undergo a potentially dangerous period of divided concentration. The alternatives are to always carry a passenger, or stop the car whenever a change of programme is required. The operation is only made possible by the excellent inertia-reel seat belts. The central console hanging below the dash would seem a far more sensible place to position the radio, occupied as it is by only four switches and a clock.

The Swedes must be a race of large-bodied heavy-weights if the size of the steering wheel, gear-shift lever, brake and accelerator pedals are any indication. But this accent on beefiness is probably the price one pays for durability. After all, it is possibly unjust to expect the delicacy of a Fiat in a car that is not intended to be particularly sporting in character.

Just when the awkward layout inside the car begins to grow annoying, the Volvo flings in one of its brilliant features to cheer you up — in this instance, the discovery of an incredible 32 ft. 10 in. turning circle capable of embarrassing mini cars. This useful feature is combined with power steering that eliminates all parking effort.

And of course there are the famed Volvo seats, leather-covered in the case of the 164 and adjustable every which way to suit a wide range of physiques.

Unfortunately, the car's power steering is not particularly brilliant on the open highway. The 164 was tracking to the left and a conscious, sustained effort was needed to maintain a straight course. Although not as bad as some examples of power steering, the ZF system used in the test Volvo was certainly not outstanding.

The car tended to wander and required those annoying little corrections that soon tire a driver.

Corners could not be taken in a smooth continuous movement but rather were negotiated in a series of "slices".

I found the steering to be rather inaccurate — more a company director's cup of tea than an enthusiast's delight. However its main attribute was effortlessness, and this is probably the primary consideration of Volvo buyers.

Another important consideration for the well-heeled purchaser is silence of operation. The 164 is not outstanding in this department either. Engine noise under hard acceleration is quite considerable and it is only when the car is in top gear and loafing along on a smooth road that anything like real quietness occurs.

This period of quiet is occasionally destroyed by striking a pot-hole or corrugation — the resulting thump inducing squeaky complaint from interior fittings, particularly from the dashboard.

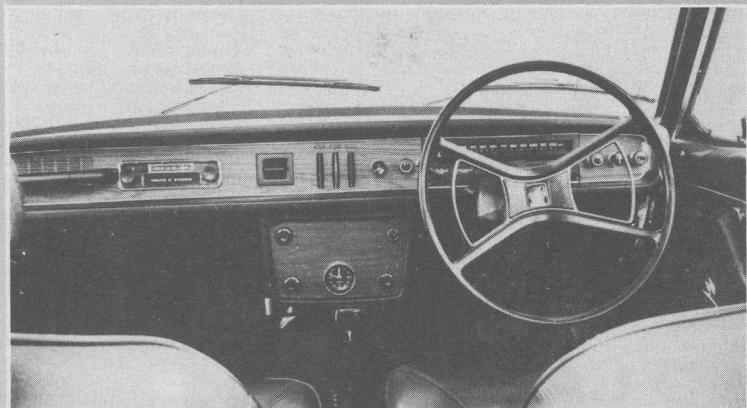
But the overall ride is smooth and comfortable. There is no tendency for the car to pitch, although there is a fair serving of body-roll. Handling on all surfaces is very good, with a gently progression from virtual neutrality to slight understeer.

The 164 shows up its rugged heritage best on gravel and dirt surfaces, where it can be pounded along without hesitation. The tail can be prodded out with a flick of the wheel and a nudge on the massive accelerator pedal, then brought quickly back into line without any fuss. This, despite a suspension system which seems almost archaic when compared to some of the 164's rivals.

The magnificent four-wheel disc brake system is outstanding on any surface. Panic stops on thick, loose gravel saw an instantaneous washing-off of speed without any trace of wheel lock-up or directional instability. Pressure relief valves are the prime reason for this exceptional performance, aided by ventilated front discs.

The ability of the Volvo to stop rapidly is even more evident on good bitumen surfaces where the breathtaking deceleration forces the car into a strong nose-down attitude.

The 164 is a little like a Mercedes, in that chassis performance is more than a match for the car's performance potential.



The sturdy six cylinder, three litre engine gives the 164 a reasonable turn of speed. It is a conventional overhead valve unit with a strong seven-bearing crankshaft.

Although strength and reliability are the primary features of the 164 engine, any tendency towards a plodding, agricultural performance is successfully countered by excellent twin-carburettor breathing. Sustained high revs pose no problem for the motor and it is quite prepared to deliver full power for as long as required.

The fact that Volvo has decided against issuing a tachometer with the 164 indicates that the company holds no

reservations about the engine's ability to absorb punishment.

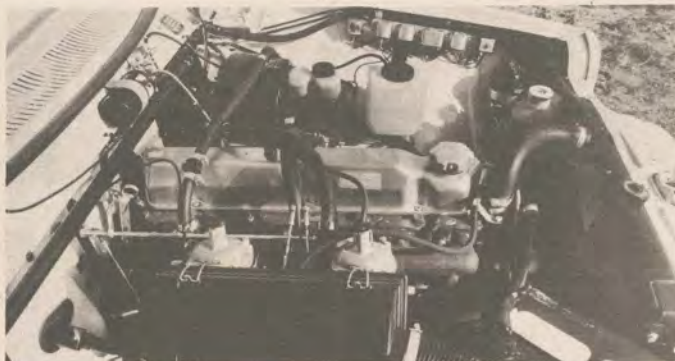
The test car was slightly out of tune and idled roughly. This caused a clunky, jolting engagement of gears when the floor-mounted selector was moved into position. But apart from this minor mal-adjustment, the automatic transmission operated faultlessly. Gear-changes were smooth and quick. The selector indicators were a little difficult to read at night but the action of the lever was precise and positive.

The 164 is an ideal car for the modern businessman. It is heavy and durable in construction but light and easy — if

uninspiring — to drive. The body is an example to more "cosmetic" manufacturers that sophisticated good-looks can be combined with excellent all-round visibility, clear views of the car's extremities, exceptional interior roominess and superb comfort.

A Volvo is a car that cannot be assessed quickly; first impressions simply don't do it justice. It is a vehicle that must be lived with, lived in, then — after the passage of a decade — completely appreciated.

MORE ➤



SPECIFICATIONS

CAR FROM:

Volvo Australia, Cecil St., South Melbourne, Vic.

PRICE AS TESTED:

\$6775.

OPTIONS FITTED:

None.

ENGINE:

Type 6 cyl. ohv.
 Bore and Stroke... 88.9 mm x 80.0 mm
 Capacity..... 2980 cc
 Compression ratio..... 9.3:1
 Power..... 145 at 5500
 Torque..... 162 ft/lbs at 3000

TRANSMISSION:

Type..... Auto 3 speed
 Ratios:
 1st..... 2.39:1
 2nd..... 1.45:1
 3rd..... 1:1
 Final drive..... 3.31:1

CHASSIS:

Wheelbase..... 106.3 inches
 Length..... 185.6 inches
 Track F..... 53.2 inches
 Track R..... 53.2 inches
 Width..... 68.3 inches
 Height..... 56.7 inches
 Clearance (Minimum)..... 7.25 inches
 Test weight..... 3084 lbs
 Fuel capacity..... 12.75 gallons

SUSPENSION:

Front: Independent, coil springs, rubber-mounted control arms, ball joints, stabiliser arm, telescopic shockers.
 Rear: Live axle, rubber-mounted support arms, torque rods, coil springs, telescopic shockers.

BRAKES:

Power assisted.
 Front: Ventilated 11.6 ins. discs.
 Rear: 11.6 in. discs.

STEERING:

Type: ZF power. Recirculating ball and nut.
 Turns lock to lock: 3.7.
 Turning circle: 32 ft. 10 in.

WHEELS/TYRES:

5½ J-15"/165 SR 15.

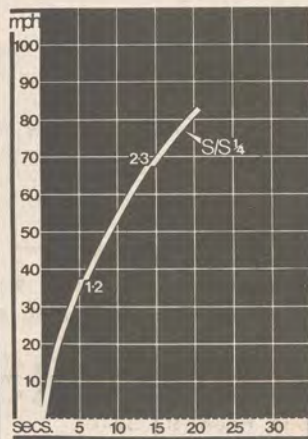
PERFORMANCE

PERFORMANCE:

Zero to
 30 mph..... 4.3 seconds
 40 mph..... 6.7 seconds
 50 mph..... 9.4 seconds
 60 mph..... 12.1 seconds
 70 mph..... 15.7 seconds
 80 mph..... NA
 90 mph..... NA
 100 mph..... NA
 Standing quarter mile 18.8 seconds.
 Fuel consumption on test 18 mpg on super fuel.
 Fuel consumption (expected) 18-20 mpg.
 Cruising range 260 miles.
 Speedometer error:
 Indicated 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
 Actual 28 38 47 57 67 NA NA NA

MAXIMUM SPEEDS IN GEARS:

1st..... 37 mph
 2nd..... 67 mph
 3rd..... NA



COMMENTS

ENGINE:

Response..... Powerful
 Vibration..... At idle
 Noise..... When accelerating

STEERING:

Effort..... Low
 Road Feel..... Fair
 Kickback..... None

SUSPENSION:

Ride comfort..... Good
 Roll resistance..... Low
 Pitch control..... Good

HANDLING:

Directional control..... Fair
 Predictability..... Very good

BRAKES:

Pedal pressure..... Low
 Response..... Powerful
 Fade resistance..... Excellent
 Directional stability..... Excellent

CONTROLS:

Wheel position..... High
 Pedal position..... Fair
 Gearshift position..... Good

INTERIOR:

Front seat comfort..... Very good
 Front leg room..... Very good
 Front head room..... Good
 Rear Seat comfort..... Excellent
 Rear leg room..... Excellent
 Rear head room..... Excellent
 Instrument legibility..... Fair

VISION:

Forward..... Excellent
 Front quarter..... Excellent
 Rear..... Excellent

CONSTRUCTION QUALITY:

Paint..... Very good
 Chrome..... Very good
 Trim..... Good

GENERAL:

Headlights — highbeam..... Fair
 Headlights — lowbeam..... Fair
 Parking/signal lights..... Good
 Wiper coverage..... Good
 Wipers at speed..... Good
 Maintenance accessibility..... Very good