



CAR and DRIVER ROAD TEST

# Volvo 164

The somewhat dated "classic" look belies its very contemporary performance



"At last," the advertisement reads, "somebody has built a luxury car as strong as a Volvo." What the ad is talking about is Volvo's own new car, the 6-cylinder 164. "Now," continues said ad, "you can get out from car payments elegantly." You still get the old "nine-out-of-every-ten-Volvos-registered-here-is-still-on-the-road" dialogue, but besides all that the 164 is clearly aiming at a whole new breed of car buyer.

Volvo dealers say that the car is right on target. The "classic" front sheet metal, the new 6-cylinder engine, the posh leather and deep carpeted interior and the endless list

of standard features add up to a package that is far from the utilitarian Volkos of old. The Swedish auto maker wanted a piece of the lucrative luxury sedan action, and the 164 is its weapon. The Volvo people are looking to steal buyers from Buick, Oldsmobile and Mercedes showrooms, and they are doing just that. Volvo's new customers are professional types—doctors, lawyers, dentists—and men with incomes which are usually above \$15,000 a year. They are people who can afford something different—people, as a line from one of their ads says, "who have money to spend,

not to burn." Volvo is looking to steal them away from fat cat Detroit and to get new car buyers who thought of Volkos before but found them wanting. It's time, Volvo is suggesting, that this delectable segment of everyone's demographics comes back for a fresh look. The efforts to attract are bearing fruit—the dealerships are being swamped.

These same people who are beating down Volvo's doors are also proving a point. There was a gap in the auto marketing structure that was waiting to be filled. If someone could come up with a package for the Upper-Middle-Class Man that would give him some snob appeal and still be dependable and pleasant to drive, that someone would have a winner. Mercedes worked up just such a package, but the price was high. Volvo saw the gap at a lower price level, and brought out the 164.

Every dealer we talked to had sold every 164 he had received, and most agencies were back-ordered for months. "The buyer isn't sure," said one salesman, "but when we go out on a test drive, he's sold." "Every person whom we have taken on a demonstration run," commented a suburban sales manager, "has come back to the showroom and bought the car."

Discounting for the endemic enthusiasm of the salesman, Volvo has something new going and the something new is an extrapolation of the familiar 144. The dimensions are the same, with only the new front styling adding four inches in overall length. The Six is really one-and-a-half of the 2-liter Fours which power the 140 series cars. The bore and stroke are the same, the head design is the same and the crank and camshafts are the same (except, of course, that they have been stretched to take care of six cylinders instead of four). But the 145 horsepower engine really makes a difference. It gives the car an unexpected amount of acceleration, and leaves the competition far behind. A Mercedes 250, with a time of 10.5 seconds, is about a second slower to 60 mph, and an Oldsmobile 98, with the optional 455 cu. in. which most people order, can't get through the quarter-mile as quickly as the 3-liter Volvo's low 17-second time.

Before the unsuspecting luxury sedan purchaser has his neck snapped by this



The 164 is exactly what Volvo intended—a more expansive, faster and more plush 144 which, at over \$1000 less, offers luxury sedan buyers an attractive alternative to a Mercedes

Swedish rocket sled, what is it that impresses him? The almost unanimous reply from people in the showrooms is the grille. The customers like it, they think it looks elegant and don't expect it to be dated in a couple of years. Why a grille which looks like it was borrowed from an Austin Princess, or a 3-liter Rover, should excite this kind of reaction from the American car buyer is beyond us. "Some identify it with a Bentley," one salesman told us, "but most just think that it has real class." That's why we're not six-figure-income stylists.

It's no surprise that the "new" Six has the same torquey, unbreakable feel that Volvos are famous for. We had hoped for something a little more contemporary and responsive, but that would have meant a whole new powerplant, which takes a long time and a lot of money to develop. With all the extra power under foot, it's a shame the car doesn't encourage you to use it. As we said, the 164 accelerates better than any other Volvo that has ever been built, but the world is not always a drag strip straight line from A to B.

The suspension is the same basic layout used on the 144. The only change that has been made is to make things a little softer still, and that doesn't exactly make you hold yourself back when the road gets twisty. Never mind, even if the live rear end hops up and down uncontrollably on rough surfaces, it doesn't transmit much of the hysteria to the passengers, and the ride on interstate highways is excellent. The 164 is a forgiving car. It's prone to pick up a wheel in the slow stuff, but if you can put all the body roll and tire squeal out of your mind, it's pretty mannerly. It is, after all, a luxury sedan, and manners matter.

If there's no jazz underneath, it's all made up for once you get inside. No squirming, no contortions, just a dignified entrance into a super interior. Getting in, with the high roof and big doors, is like marching into a limousine. You open the door and there they are, the most comfortable big *leather* seats we've seen in a long time. The fronts, which are basically the same as the 144's, can be adjusted in four separate ways, and look like they were pulled out of someone's comfortable library or study. The seat travel is as great as you could ever use (assuming that you're not starting in the NBA). And if that's not enough, there is a mechanism that can raise or lower each seat to one of four levels, with a total relief from top to bot-

tom of travel of 1.6 inches. The fronts are also fully reclining and have infinitely adjustable back angles, but this rake adjustment also has an interesting and new safety device built into it. If you get hit from the rear, no more getting out of the car with your hand holding your neck until the lawyer comes—whiplash has been foiled. If there is rear impact at any speed over 10 mph, a friction mechanism releases and the seat back gives. You and the seat fall back and your neck stays in one piece.

The rest of the interior, while certainly not bad, does not match the thought that is so apparent in the seats. It's straight from the 144 and out of character with the rest of the fixings. The instrumentation is easy to read but minimal, and despite Volvo's reputation for faultless reliability, we're the kind of people who, even in these days of non-involvement, like to know what's happening under the hood. There's a fuel gauge, a "C—H" water temperature gauge, a bunch of warning lights and a horizontal band speedometer, but that's it. In front of the driver is a huge black plastic steering wheel whose size is unnecessary with the standard ZF-designed power steering. Steering effort certainly doesn't call for a large wheel to give the driver extra leverage in hauling the 164 around corners or into parking spaces.

In tight squeezes, like minuscule parking spaces, the 31.5-foot turning circle is an unexpected pleasure. Even though it feels like you're in a pretty good sized automobile, you can maneuver in and out of traffic with surprising ease and agility.

The high beam selector is part of the directional signal mechanism. You pull the stalk towards you to get more light or flick it back to lower the beams. It works well but the action is so easy that you have to make a conscious effort not to push the lever forward (and thus change the beam) when you want to signal a direction change. To the left of the instruments are three dials to control the heating and defrosting. They have inlaid red plastic so that the more you turn them the more they are illuminated, a simple and effective method of displaying information. The one closest to the driver is for temperature, the middle for defrosting and the far right for directing heat to the floor area.

To the immediate left of the speedometer are four pull and/or twist knobs that control the windshield washer and wipers, parking lights and headlights, the choke and

the rear defroster. To the immediate right are the lighter, fan and flasher knobs. Not revolutionary, but in direct line with the simple straightforwardness that seems to be the Volvo's theme song.

One very un-Volvo feature is the new indirect shift lever. The yardstick-like wands that used to make Volvo cockpits look like delivery trucks are a thing of the past. Now there is a stubby little chrome stalk that stirs things around in the new 4-speed manual transmission in a positive manner.

The only things which we didn't understand about the interior were the fake wood material that had been glued to the dashboard and the position of the radio. You have the great seats, very attractive carpeting of new Volvo-developed vinyl material and a subdued air of luxury, and then this poor imitation finish which has quite obviously been stuck on.

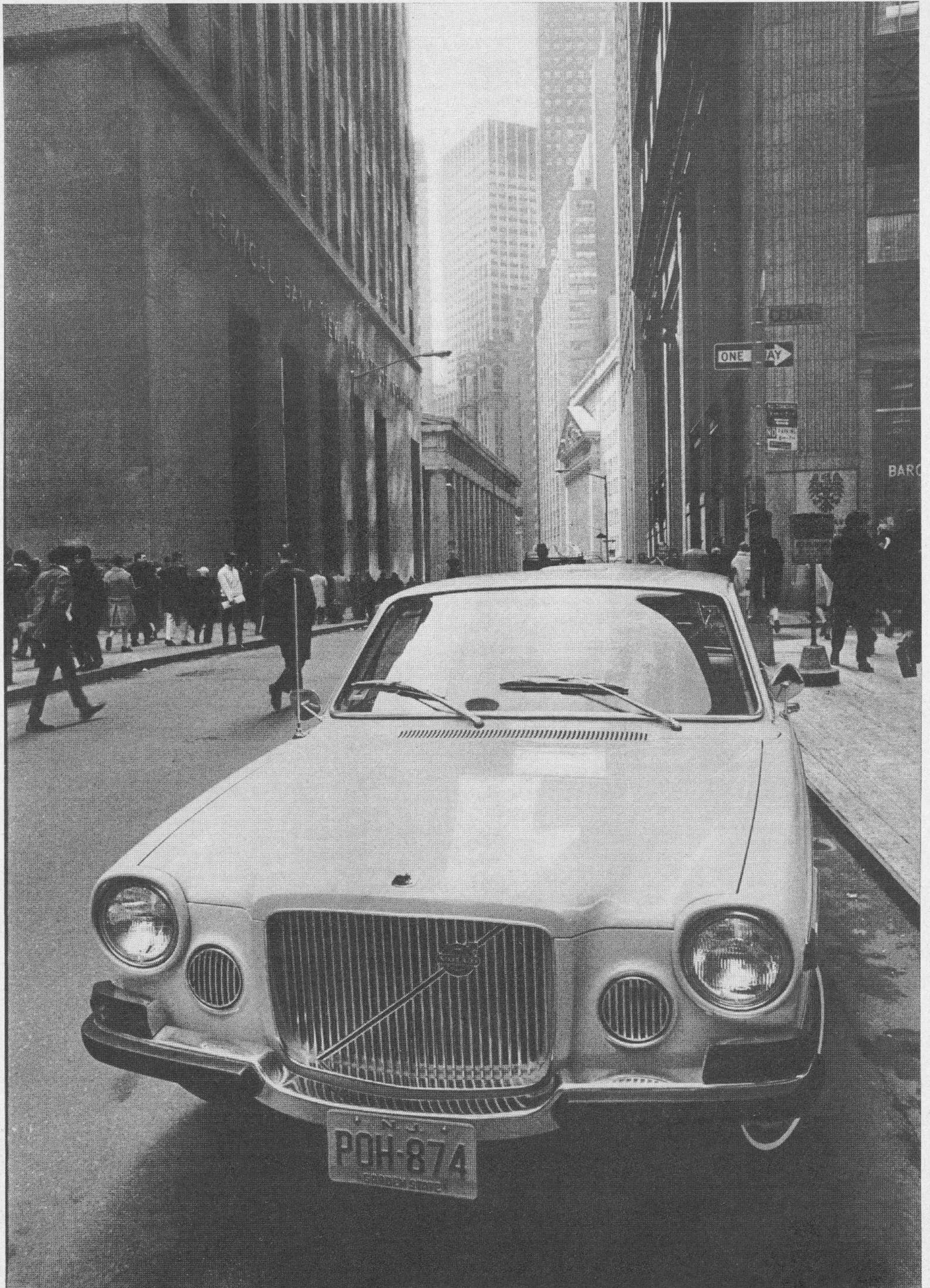
The power 4-wheel disc brakes, on the other hand, did not work as well as its predecessors. Stopping power was equivalent, but after pushing hard on the pedal, it feels that there is a lag—almost as if the pads were hanging up and still grabbing the discs. This is not the case, and you soon get used to the pedal. Strange or not, the discs (which are 35% larger in the front than those on the 140-series) stop the big 164 time after time without fade.

The fail-safe braking device, which keeps three wheels with stopping power even if one of the two hydraulic systems fails, has been carried over from the 144s. Along with that safeguard, there are proportioning valves that supposedly keep the rear wheels from locking in hard stops. Wheel lock-up wasn't a problem, so the proportioning valves must have been doing their job.

Put it all together and you have exactly what Volvo intended—a more expansive, faster and more plush 144. Inside and out, it is a car that is strongly based on the 144, but it has its very own personality. The prestige of, say, the Mercedes name isn't there (although Volvo has built a pretty good image of its own), the mechanical sophistication of full independent suspension and overhead cam engines isn't there, but the 164 still has significantly better straightline performance than a 250, and at \$4200 is more than \$1300 cheaper than a similarly equipped 250. And too, the public has reacted to the 164 more positively than Volvo had ever thought. It is a success. What more could Volvo ask?

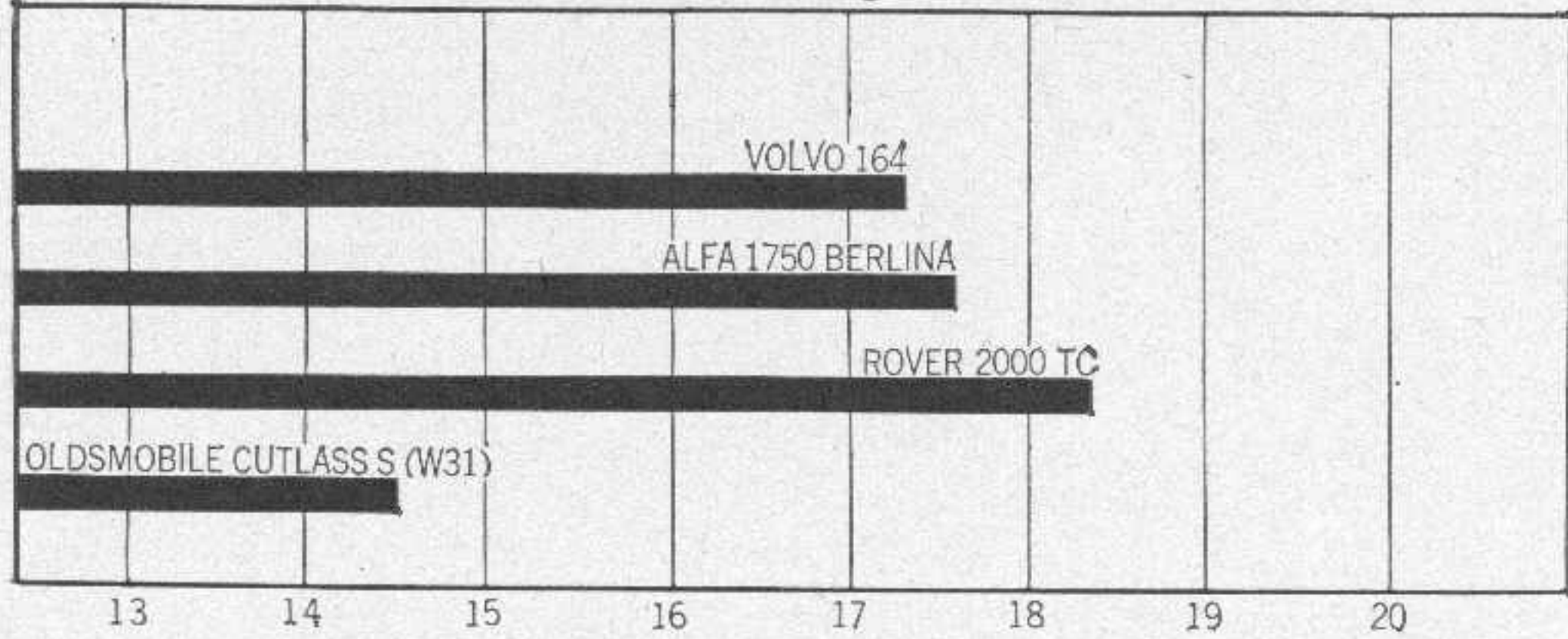
(Specifications overleaf)



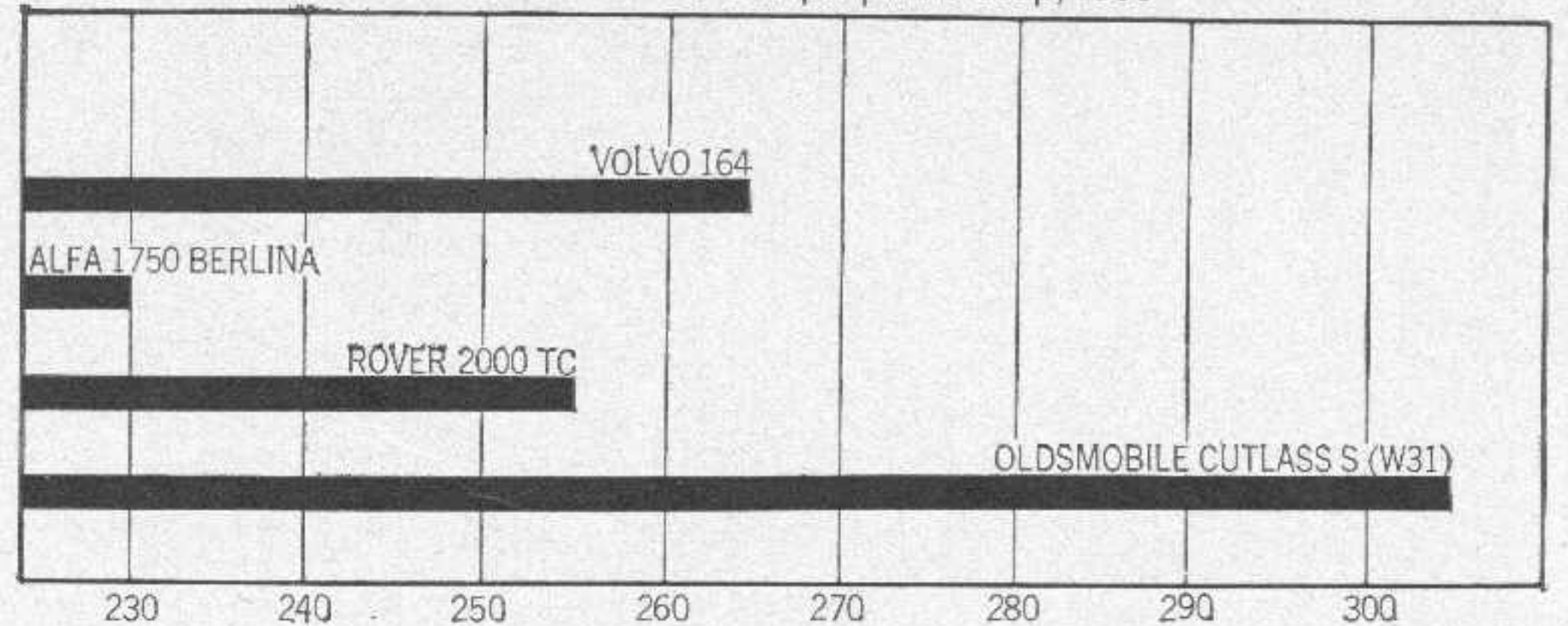




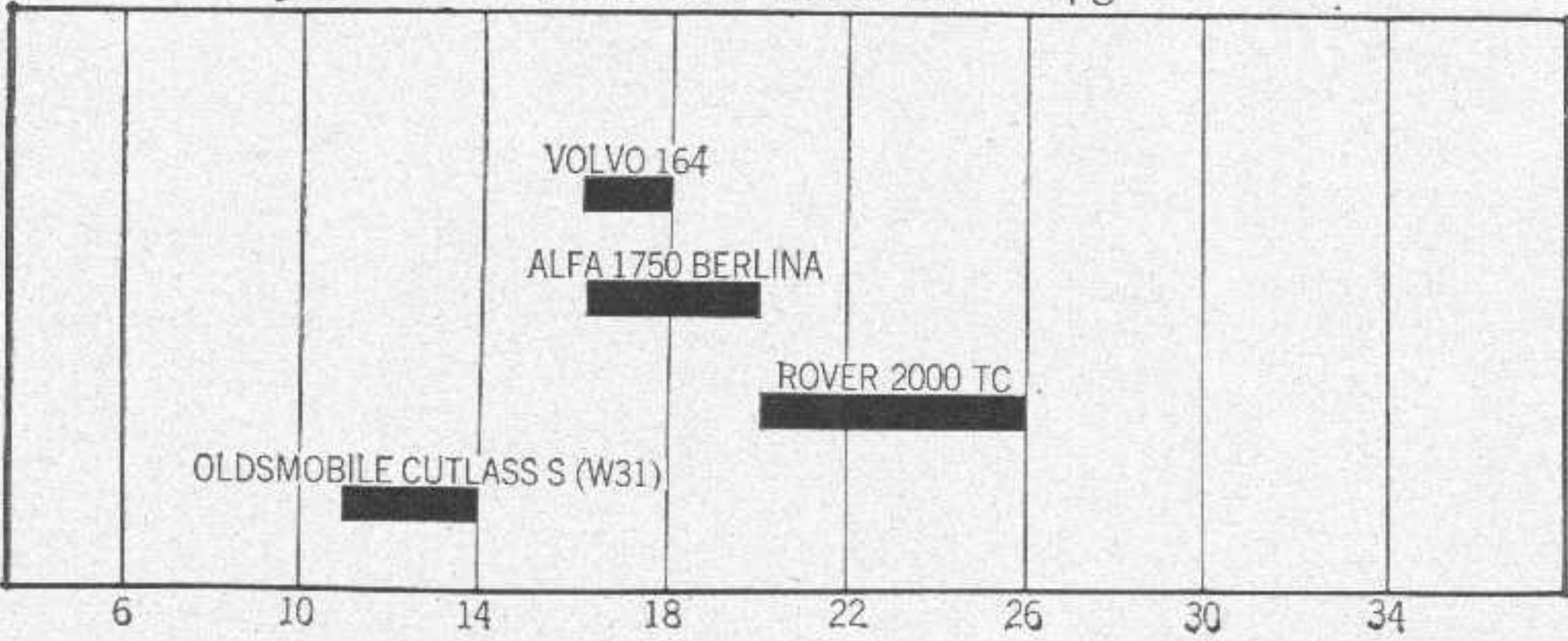
**ACCELERATION** standing 1/4 mile, seconds



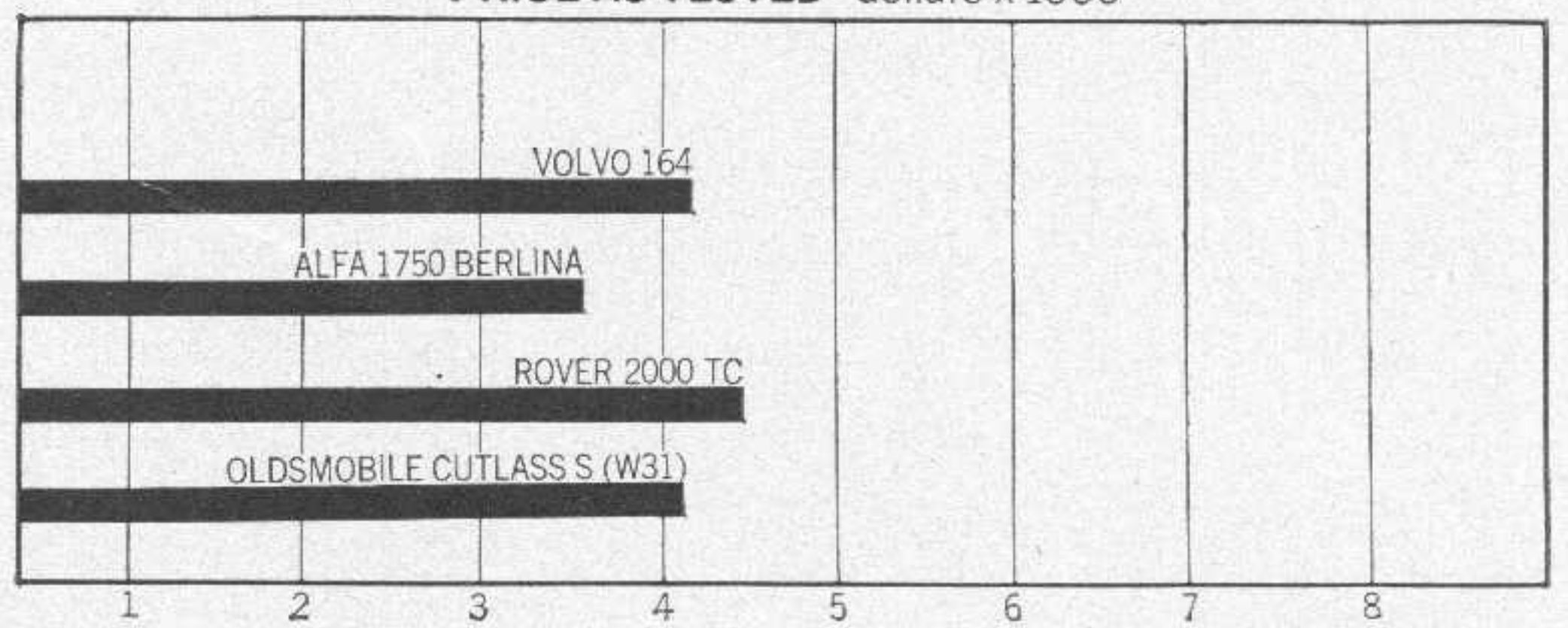
**BRAKING** 80-0 mph panic stop, feet



**FUEL ECONOMY RANGE** mpg



**PRICE AS TESTED** dollars x 1000



**VOLVO 164**

**Importer/Manufacturer:** Volvo, Inc.  
Rockleigh,  
New Jersey 07647

**Vehicle type:** front engine, rear-wheel-drive,  
5-passenger, 4-door sedan

**Price as tested:** \$4130.55  
(Manufacturer's suggested retail price, including all options listed below, Federal excise tax, dealer preparation and delivery charges, does not include state and local taxes, license or freight charges)

**Options on test car:** AM/FM radio, \$135.55

**ENGINE**

Type: 6-in-line, water-cooled, cast iron block and heads, 7 main bearings  
Bore x stroke... 3.50 x 3.15 in, 89.0 x 80.0 mm  
Displacement... 182 cu in, 2979 cc  
Compression ratio... 9.2 to one  
Carburetor... 2 x 1.661  
1.75-inch Zenith-Stromberg cdse  
Valve gear... pushrod operated overhead valves  
Power (SAE)... 145 bhp @ 5500 rpm  
Torque (SAE)... 163 lbs/ft @ 3000 rpm  
Specific power output... 0.80 bhp/cu in, 47.8 bhp/liter

**DRIVE TRAIN**

Transmission... 4-speed, all-synchro  
Final drive ratio... 3.73 to one  
Gear Ratio Mph/1000 rpm Max. test speed  
I 3.14 6.2 34 mph (5500 rpm)  
II 1.97 9.8 54 mph (5500 rpm)  
III 1.34 14.5 80 mph (5500 rpm)  
IV 1.00 19.5 97 mph (5000 rpm)

**DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES**

Wheelbase... 106.3 in  
Track, F/R... 53.1/53.1 in  
Length... 185.6 in  
Width... 68.3 in  
Height... 56.7 in  
Ground clearance... 7.1 in  
Curb weight... 2820 lbs  
Weight distribution, F/R... 55.7/44.3%  
Battery capacity... 12 volts, 60 amp/hr  
Generator/Alternator capacity... 420 watts  
Fuel capacity... 15.5 gal  
Oil capacity... 5.5 qts  
Water capacity... 13.0 qts

**SUSPENSION**

F: Ind., unequal length control arms, coil springs, anti-sway bar  
R: Right axle, double, unequal length trailing arms, coil springs, panhard rod

**STEERING**

Type... Cam and roller, power assisted  
Turns lock-to-lock... 4.0  
Turning circle curb-to-curb... 31.8 ft

**BRAKES**

F: 10.7-in disc, power assisted  
R: 11.6-in disc, power assisted

**WHEELS AND TIRES**

Wheel size... 15 x 4.5-in  
Wheel type... Stamped steel, 5 bolt  
Tire make and size... Goodyear power cushion 6.85 x 15  
Tire type... Tubeless, bias ply  
Test inflation pressures, F/R... 24/26 psi  
Tire load rating... 1230 lbs per tire @ 30 psi

**PERFORMANCE**

Zero to	Seconds
30 mph	2.6
40 mph	4.6
50 mph	6.7
60 mph	9.9
70 mph	13.6
80 mph	18.2
90 mph	25.0
Standing 1/4-mile	17.3 sec @ 78.2 mph
Top speed (estimated)	108 mph
80-0 mph	264 ft (0.81 G)
Fuel mileage	16-18 mpg on premium fuel
Cruising range	248-280 mi

