

VOLVO 262C

Top of the marque

PHOTOS BY JOHN LAMM



NO DOUBT ABOUT IT—the Volvo 262C “personal touring coupe,” blessed by the considerable engineering talent of its own respected designers and sleekly groomed by Bertone’s assembly artists, is a marketing adventure for Volvo and a handsome and capable automobile. And it should be, at just a smidgen over \$15,000, as our test car stood. At that price, however, it enters the automotive market in a favorable, even threatening price position; at least several thousand below such recognized heavyweights as the Mercedes-Benz 280CE, the XJ6 and XJ12 Jaguars, and it might even occasionally glance over into the sacrosanct stall of that proud American wheelhorse of luxury, the similarly priced Cadillac Seville.

But as we pointed out just after the car’s European introduction at the Geneva auto show (July 1977 R&T), that’s not the whole story. Even more important to Volvo than going head-to-head with some of those firmly established residents of the luxury-class field is the necessity of spurring sales with a shakeup of the company image. It worked just fine through the Sixties and early Seventies with the limited-production P1800 2-seater sports car, and Volvo management decided around 1974 that the time was ripe to show the world—and particularly the U.S. world—just what it could do in the growing luxury-car market. And the term “limited-production” means just that: Current plans are to send this country just 1000 262Cs during 1978, out of a total production of a little more than 1200. Now, *that’s* exclusive.

Again, the car is handsome, particularly to the public. A couple of staff pundits questioned the relative proportions of the upper greenhouse and the lower body, one claiming the low, black roof made it resemble a comic with his hat pulled down a little too far, and the other commenting on the resemblance between the front-end treatment of the 262C, or any Volvo for that matter, and one of those dummy-testing safety cars (more on this later). But the public loves it. Everywhere we drove we were conscious of quick interest and sustained attention. Passers-by requested information, fellow drivers held position long enough for a thorough inspection, and one freeway flyer snubbed down for awhile ahead of us in the next lane and, to our increasing alarm, took a long series of backward views of the car before howling off again into the traffic toward his particular destiny. Dealers, too, have shown high interest; offering other dealers \$1500 over list, just to get their hands on one of these coupes.

The responsibility of styling the car was given to Jan Wilksgaard, Volvo’s Chief of Design, who was asked in 1974 to develop a luxury-style coupe from a sedan series being designed at that time. Many of his modifications were subtle, but one is quite apparent: He lowered the sedan roof 2.4 in. for the coupe.



Though Wilksgaard also lowered the seats 1.2 in., there simply is not enough head room, and it produced steady complaints from the testing staff. This dimension will have to be increased—probably by further lowering of the seats.

The hint of safety design in the car’s overall appearance is not accidental. It actually is designed around the results of Volvo’s long, well publicized crash-testing program, and contains many excellent features of safety engineering. One of these is the designed-in ability of the body to crumple progressively fore and aft when under physical assault. The passenger compartment is protected by box-section pillars and rocker panels, the fuel tank is tucked up well ahead of the trunk, giving it a chance to escape crash damage, and the heavy, rubber-clad bumpers obviously are built to shunt, or shrug off into their gas-loaded shock absorbers, those minor parking lot encounters so trying to the soul of a luxury-car owner. Protection in another category is provided by the application of a transparent polyester coating to the rocker





panels, diminishing the ability of gravel to chip, or rock salt to corrode.

The black-and-silver color scheme of our test car is the only combination available, at least during this model year. Fortunately, this choice is eye-catching and relatively sophisticated from most points of view around the car. It is even more impressive, however, when the wide coupe doors are opened and one visually enters the rich, black opulence of the interior.

Inside is where the selling is really done, of course, where the prospective buyer actually begins to form up a picture of himself as the real-life owner of the car. The inner chamber simply has to show unusually good treatment in a luxury automobile, and it does in the 262C. First, there is fine black leather everywhere—seats, door panels and map pockets, sun visors, headliner trim and rear panels—all are covered with soft, pleated furniture-grade leather. (Oddly, though, the steering wheel and arm rests are covered in synthetic material rather than leather.) Then there

is the real wood; in this case an attractive elm burl veneer panel on the doors, which is perforated for the stereo speakers. This design element does not come off quite as impressively as the leather, mostly because the veneer backing shows through inside the perforations and, unimportant as it seems, gives an odd, jarring note to the overall appearance of the door. Of course, this could be improved easily, either by the application of a little stain or by going to a darker backing for the veneer.

The most important remaining interior feature of the 262C is the instrument panel. It is every bit as complete and functional and safe as the panels in the rest of Volvo's 260 series—as a matter of fact, it is exactly the *same* as the panels in the rest of the series. The gauges are readable, the row of color-coded rocker switches gives quick and accurate control over such matters as air conditioning, seat heating (front seats only) and electric window lifts; the whole layout is simple and usable, but we have a feeling that buyers of this machine really deserve just a bit more luxurious appearance.

The radio lies just behind the base of the transmission stalk, out of convenient line of sight. And woe to the passenger who attempts to tune the radio during a strong and active use of the 4-speed manual gearbox. There is little hand room between the lever in its 1st and 3rd gear positions and the radio knobs and buttons. The unwary will receive a quick and painful education in the subject.

Luxury-car radios have to offer just a little more of everything, and selecting one of the sound systems available for the coupe is one of the very few extra-cost choices a buyer is required to make; just about everything else of possible interest has been made standard equipment. Our test car had an excellent AM/FM stereo incorporating a cassette tape deck. Reception and fidelity were fine, particularly with the tape.

It is true that \$15,000 is substantial cash for a car (though unfortunately far more common today than yesterday), but the price must be held up against the nature and value of the



product. For example, the following is a partial listing of the equipment *standard* on the 262C: air conditioner, cruise control, power-assisted steering and brakes, rear-window heater, electric remote-control side mirrors, electric window lifts, power-antenna, plush carpeting throughout (including the trunk), tinted glass, special light-alloy wheels, a quartz-crystal clock, and so forth. Those who intend to market luxury cars know very well that these are the necessities. Products in this range have to come loaded, and a load of that kind of special equipment has its inevitably high price. Also, the very exclusivity of a limited production car, especially one begun in Sweden and finished in Italy, adds to its cost in a dozen ways. For a vehicle of this individuality and complexity, the price is substantial, all right, but far from outrageous.

The seats of the 262C have enough controls to permit nearly any kind and amount of adjustment. They fold forward, they



recline all the way back by infinite degrees, they lower at the front or the rear, and they even have a soft/firm knob for adjusting lumbar support firmness. There is excellent thigh support for long touring comfort, and the leather-covered head restraints are absolute models of classic design and efficiency. Any complaints? Well, yes—besides the seats needing to be a couple of inches lower, those beautiful, wide, braided-leather straps across the back and bottom became irritating after awhile to the back and bottom, and just about all of us decided the seat cushions were too firm. These problems would seem easy enough to correct.

The coupe's engine is the faithful and familiar sohc V-6, Bosch fuel-injected, with 125 bhp at 5750 rpm and pulling 150 lb-ft of torque at 2750. Now, however, it is carrying the Lambda Sond 3-way catalytic emission system Volvo started installing on some of its 4-cylinder engines a couple of years ago. The engine shows generally even power flow from bottom to top, but when revved it produces some of the same staccato exhaust sound as the Maserati Merak. The irregular power pulses of the 90-degree V-6 design can be heard clearly—fine in a sports car, but detracting a little from this car's dignified luxury image. Our sample wasn't an eager starter, requiring quite a few preliminary spins, but once lighted off, it delivered smooth driveability and quick warmup. However, the silicone-damped engine fan was noisy in the morning, issuing surprising whooming sounds. The 91-octane unleaded fuel is delivered by a continuous-flow fuel injection system, at the rate of about a gallon every 16.5 miles.

The car is no fireball in stop-and-go traffic, but does leg it out nicely on the open road. Given a fairly decent road surface, with the overdrive switched in, the windows raised and the air-conditioning fan on its low setting, one can enjoy the finer points of music or an intimate conversation at 70 mph and above. We noticed some wind noise around the side mirrors at that speed, but the steep rake of the windshield slides the frontal air gently up and quietly over the top.

Out of curiosity we made a comparison of the 262C's inside noise levels with those of Volvo's station wagon. The coupe ran quieter, as expected, from idle up through 70, and showed its greatest decibel advantage at city speeds around 30 mph. A surprising anomaly did show up, however, at "maximum speed in 1st gear," where the station wagon recorded a full 8-decibel quieter reading than the luxury coupe. We have no ready explanation.

The test car sported Volvo's stout and solid 4-speed manual transmission, with switch-operated electric overdrive, which will be included on just 10 percent of the American coupes. The remainder will offer a 3-speed automatic. The shift lever is properly short, stiff and is located exactly where it should be. Reverse has a lockout which is defeated by a pull-ring disc just under the shift knob. We had a little trouble entering reverse and 1st gear when in a hurry. The automatic and overdrive transmissions are standard; it's just a matter of choice.

The brakes are strong and sure, and using them hard a time or two gave us a feeling of grand security. They grabbed not, neither did they fade in our series of panic stops and, outside of an occasional characteristic squeal, provided positive, progressive braking at its best. These are vacuum-assisted discs, 10.3- and 11.0-in. front and rear, and they have one very fine safety feature. Volvo calls it a "dual triangle-split hydraulic system, with



stepped-bore master cylinder." The idea is that either half of the system can fail yet leave the driver both front brakes and one rear, plus enough power-assist to control the ton-and-a-half automobile. Not bad at all.

The engineers of the 262C put their faith in power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering, and to good effect. The car steers quickly and accurately—with understeer in most situations, but with mild oversteer if you break the inside rear wheel loose in tight bends. Added feedback through the system would feel more natural, as the steering effort is a little too light. Also, the nose dips on quick lane changes or slalom-type exercises, and really fast slalom driving produces sidewise tail-hop.

Staff opinions were divided regarding ride and handling. Logic advises that marketable luxury cars must ride with great gentleness, to shield the master and madame from the harsh realities of the road. However, logic also states that strong, firm contact with those same surface realities will bring the honored couple back to the manse with greater certainty and safety. The coupe has a good, very comfortable ride, with just a little softness and a fair amount of body roll. Even at that, it's firmer than that of most U.S. luxury cars, but most of us would have liked even a little more ride control.

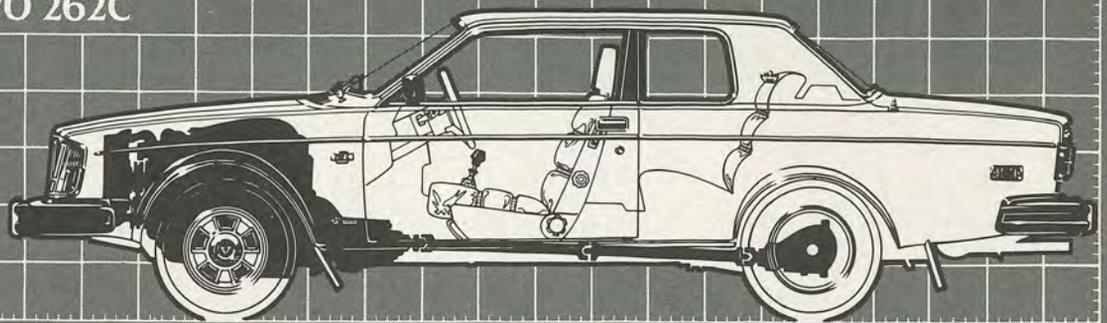
We saved a good touch for last. Though played down in Volvo's literature, it sums up several different aspects of the 262C including perceptive engineering, use of new products, and a good understanding of what sells this kind of car. It is, simply enough, the spare tire. But this spare is a deflated space-saver, which loses enough diameter when "flat" to stand upright in the trunk, even with no visible tire well below it. And do you inflate it with one of those undependable little spray cans? Nope—the trunk also contains a neat little portable compressor. It plugs into the lighter socket and is capable of inflating spares, regular tires, beach balls and rubber boats.

Now, *that's* the kind of touch that closes luxury car sales. ☐



ROAD TEST

VOLVO 262C



SCALE: 10" DIVISIONS

PRICE

List price, all POE\$14,700
 Price as tested\$15,223
 Price as tested includes: standard equipment (air cond, cruise control, heated front seats), AM/FM stereo/cassette (\$263), Lambda Sond system (\$76), floor mats (\$34) dlr prep (est \$150)

IMPORTER

Volvo, Inc
 Rockleigh, N.J. 07646

GENERAL

Curb weight, lb 3120
 Test weight 3235
 Weight distribution (with driver), front/rear, % 54/46
 Wheelbase, in. 104.0
 Track, front/rear 56.3/53.5
 Length 192.5
 Width 67.3
 Height 53.9
 Ground clearance 5.5
 Overhang, front/rear 38.5/50.0
 Usable trunk space, cu ft 17.9
 Fuel capacity, U.S. gal. 15.8

ENGINE

Type sohc V-6
 Bore x stroke, mm 88.0 x 73.0
 Equivalent in. 3.46 x 2.87
 Displacement, cc/cu in. ... 2660/162
 Compression ratio 8.2:1
 Bhp @ rpm, net 125 @ 5750
 Equivalent mph 141
 Torque @ rpm, lb-ft .. 150 @ 2750
 Equivalent mph 67
 Fuel injection Bosch CIS
 Fuel requirement.. unleaded, 91-oct
 Exhaust-emission control equipment:
 3-way catalytic converter

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission...4-sp manual with OD
 Gear ratios: OD (0.80) 2.98:1
 4th (1.00) 3.73:1
 3rd (1.37) 5.11:1
 2nd (2.16) 8.06:1
 1st (3.71) 13.84:1
 Final drive ratio 3.73:1

ACCOMMODATION

Seating capacity, persons 4
 Seat width, f/r, in. ... 2 x 20.5/52.5
 Head room, f/r 36.0/33.0
 Seat back adjustment, deg 50

CHASSIS & BODY

Layout front engine/rear drive
 Body/frame unit steel
 Brake system 10.3-in. discs front, 11.0-in. discs rear; vacuum assisted
 Swept area, sq in. 411
 Wheels cast alloy, 14 x 5½J
 Tires ... Michelin XZS, 185/70SR-14
 Steering type rack & pinion, power assisted
 Overall ratio 17.0:1
 Turns, lock-to-lock 3.5
 Turning circle, ft 32.2
 Front suspension: MacPherson struts, lower A-arms, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar
 Rear suspension: live axle on trailing arms & Panhard rod, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar

INSTRUMENTATION

Instruments: 130-mph speedo, 999-999 odometer, 999.9 trip odometer, coolant temp, fuel level, clock
 Warning lights: oil press., brake system, handbrake, alternator, rear-window heat, overdrive, oxygen sensor, bulb failure, seatbelts, hazard, high beam, directionals

MAINTENANCE

Service intervals, mi:
 Oil change 7500
 Filter change 7500
 Chassis lube 7500
 Minor tuneup 15,000
 Major tuneup 30,000
 Warranty, mo/mi 12/unlimited

CALCULATED DATA

Lb/bhp (test weight) 25.9
 Mph/1000 rpm (OD) 24.3
 Engine revs/mi (60 mph) 2470
 Piston travel, ft/mi 1180
 R&T steering index 1.13
 Brake swept area, sq in./ton .. 254

RELIABILITY

From R&T Owner Surveys the average number of problem areas for all models surveyed is 12. An average of 7 of these problem areas is considered serious enough to constitute reliability areas that could keep the car off the road. As owners of earlier-model Volvos reported 10 problem areas and 4 reliability areas we expect the overall reliability of the Volvo 262C to be better than average.

ROAD TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION

Time to distance, sec:
 0-100 ft 3.6
 0-500 ft 9.8
 0-1320 ft (¼ mi) 18.3
 Speed at end of ¼ mi, mph 76.5
 Time to speed, sec:
 0-30 mph 3.3
 0-40 mph 5.3
 0-50 mph 7.7
 0-60 mph 11.1
 0-70 mph 15.0
 0-80 mph 20.5
 0-90 mph 29.2

SPEEDS IN GEARS

OD (4500 rpm) 109
 4th (5600) 109
 3rd (6000) 86
 2nd (6000) 56
 1st (6000) 32

FUEL ECONOMY

Normal driving, mpg 16.5
 Cruising range, mi (1-gal. res) .. 244

HANDLING

Speed on 100-ft radius, mph .. 32.5
 Lateral acceleration, g 0.704
 Speed thru 700-ft slalom, mph... 56.5

BRAKES

Minimum stopping distances, ft:
 From 60 mph 162
 From 80 mph 271
 Control in panic stop very good
 Pedal effort for 0.5g stop, lb 20
 Fade: percent increase in pedal effort to maintain 0.5g deceleration in 6 stops from 60 mph nil
 Parking: hold 30% grade? yes
 Overall brake rating very good

INTERIOR NOISE

All noise readings in dBA:
 Idle in neutral 54
 Maximum, 1st gear 86
 Constant 30 mph 62
 50 mph 68
 70 mph 74
 90 mph 77

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph indicated is actually ... 32.0
 50 mph 52.0
 60 mph 61.0
 70 mph 71.0
 80 mph 80.5
 Odometer, 10.0 mi 10.2

ACCELERATION

