



VOLVO 242GT

*At last, another
Volvo that can be fun to drive*

PHOTOS BY JOE RUSZ



THERE WAS A time when Volvos were fun, the proof being such models as the PV544 or the 122, with the B18 version of the old ohv inline four. Volvos were rallied and respected as tough little sedans that could get out of their own way, even with a load of four passengers. Then Volvo went upmarket with the 140 series and apparently the Swedes felt their new, more affluent audience didn't care to enjoy themselves in an automobile. Therefore, the new Volvos were many things—among them frugal, spacious and practical—but certainly not fun.

Exactly one year ago we compared a Volvo 244DL to the cream of the sporting sedans in its price class ("Eight Sports Sedan Comparison Test") and while the 244 scored well on amenities, it ranked low on the sporting scale. Our comment was, "Although the Volvo won't embarrass either itself or its driver on a twisty road, it's much more at home cruising down the freeway with the wife up front and the kids in back." We summed up the car's handling by saying, "All very safe and predictable, but hardly fast or sporty."

Obviously last year's Volvo didn't exactly send the blood racing through our veins and our main interest in the car centered



around the Lambda Sond 3-way catalytic converter that was supplied on our California test car. We were beginning to think the Volvo people were spending too much time in the laboratory (which is nonetheless laudatory) and not enough time yumping about on the back roads enjoying themselves. And now Volvo has proved us wrong with the 242GT.

While this is a brand new 1978 Volvo model, the basic type of car isn't new to most southern California automotive writers. Volvo's western branch has always had a special car or two in circulation, built from factory-available parts and being what the 242GT is now, which is fun.

Volvo's GT treatment starts on the outside with silver paint brightened with black-and-orange stripes along the car's beltline. This model has its own grille, complete with a pair of fog lights,

and vogueish black trim. Volvo also adds a functional lower front spoiler and happily they refrain from mounting a lip spoiler on the trailing edge of the trunk lid. That would have been too much and as it is they've done a reasonable job of adding an aggressive look to the basic boxy Volvo shape. It certainly made a few people we know take notice and then admit they hadn't "seen" a Volvo in several years.

Inside is the standard Volvo dashboard with an orange accent line running around the entire interior just below the window line. The seats are unique to the GT, with a black corduroy finish stitched to add more side support. The shift lever is shorter than stock, though we've had few complaints with Volvo shifters in the past. Overall, the 242GT's interior is tastefully done with everything well displayed or within easy reach.

Unlike many auto makers' GT options, Volvo's continue underneath with pieces that really matter. The stock rear 19-mm anti-roll bar is joined by a 21-mm front bar that replaces the standard 17-mm bar. Stiffer springs and necessarily revalved shock absorbers are also added, the chassis package completed with Pirelli 185/70HR-14 radials on nice-looking alloy wheels. By contrast, last year's test car was equipped with CR78-14s. The engine in all GTs will be a 50-state engine with Lambda Sond emission control and 101 bhp at 5200 rpm, the same as last year's California-only 3-way catalyst powerplant.

So much for the laundry lists; do all these changes make a difference? Yes, they do. To quote last year, "... there's moderate understeer at all times with cornering power limited by lifting of the inside rear wheel..." Well, the body roll and understeer aren't gone, but the car's cornering attitude is decidedly flatter and steadier than before. Tuck the nose into that initial understeer, hang in there and the GT will transition smoothly to oversteer, something we haven't felt a Volvo do for several seasons. To make the package on our test car still sweeter, Volvo added a limited slip differential (\$337, dealer installed) to eliminate any chance of losing power to wheelspin. At 0.754g on the skidpad, the Volvo out-turned all the cars on last year's test with the exception of the highly rated Saab, and the 242 hit the EMS's number right on the head. Through the slalom at 57.5 mph, the Volvo GT topped every car but the Saab 99 EMS and the Audi Fox, beating some very heady competition. (Still, one staff member felt that if Volvo wants to tag the car as a GT, they could have gone even stiffer with the suspension and perhaps lowered the car an inch or so.) What happened to the Volvo's ride? It's stiffer, adding a measure of freeway hop, but that doesn't translate as objectionable to us.

One thing that would add to the GT's image is more horsepower. You do get into situations with the 242 where the ability to add a little throttle would bring the car even more smoothly around a corner, but the power just isn't there. With a 0-60 time of 11.3 sec, the Volvo has caught up with the competition somewhat and is in a league with the Mercedes-Benz 280E, which isn't bad company, yet with the 242's GT label you feel somewhat underwhelmed. On driveability the engine gets high marks, starting easily in our damp cold and working happily from there. The Volvo also takes a nod on fuel economy, with 20.0 mpg in our mileage test.

The 242 GT's driving environment is also a plus. The seats, as usual, are excellent and that little extra lateral support is helpful. In this car you sit up in a command position, giving you a feeling of control over the car and the driving situation. The power steering sends back enough road feel to add still more confidence, though it is so light as to be uncomfortable during hard driving. The brakes are up to the usual high Volvo standard with good control under hard application.

As much of a driver's car as this 242 has become, it is still basic Volvo, so you can load it up with family and plenty of luggage. The car is quiet compared to its contemporaries and you can talk, or hear the radio without cranking the volume up too high. We're not sure the GT name applies, but then the meaning of those initials has become hazy of late. We are sure, though, that this is the most enjoyable production Volvo we've driven in almost a decade.

PRICE	
List price, all POE.....	\$7995
Price as tested.....	\$9497

GENERAL	
Curb weight, lb.....	2930
Weight distribution (with driver), front/rear, %.....	53/47
Wheelbase, in.....	104.0
Track, front/rear.....	56.7/53.0
Length.....	192.6
Width.....	67.2
Height.....	56.2
Fuel capacity, U.S. gal.....	15.8

CHASSIS & BODY	
Body/frame.....	unit steel
Brake system.....	10.3-in. discs front, 11.0-in. discs rear; vacuum assisted
Wheels.....	cast alloy, 14 x 5½
Tires.....	Pirelli CN36, 185/70HR-14
Steering type.....	rack & pinion, power assisted
Turns, lock-to-lock.....	3.5
Suspension, front/rear:	MacPherson struts, lower A-arms, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar/live axle on trailing arms & Panhard rod, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar

ENGINE & DRIVETRAIN	
Type.....	sohc inline 4
Bore x stroke, mm.....	92.0 x 80.0
Displacement, cc/cu in.....	2127/130
Compression ratio.....	8.5:1
Bhp @ rpm, net.....	101 @ 5200
Torque @ rpm, lb-ft.....	111 @ 2500
Fuel requirement, unleaded, 91-oct.....	
Transmission.....	4-sp manual with OD
Gear ratios: OD (0.80).....	3.13:1
4th (1.00).....	3.91:1
3rd (1.37).....	5.36:1
2nd (2.16).....	8.45:1
1st (3.71).....	14.51:1
Final drive ratio.....	3.91:1

CALCULATED DATA	
Lb/bhp (test weight).....	30.3
Mph/1000 rpm (OD).....	23.4
Engine revs/mi (60 mph).....	2560

R&T steering index.....	1.13
Brake swept area, sq in./ton.....	257

ROAD TEST RESULTS
ACCELERATION

Time to distance, sec:	
0-100 ft.....	3.6
0-500 ft.....	9.7
0-1320 ft (¼ mi).....	18.5
Speed at end of ¼ mi, mph.....	75.0
Time to speed, sec:	
0-30 mph.....	3.3
0-50 mph.....	7.7
0-60 mph.....	11.3
0-80 mph.....	21.4
0-90 mph.....	30.3

SPEEDS IN GEARS	
OD (4700 rpm).....	109
4th gear (5900).....	109
3rd (6500).....	86
2nd (6500).....	54
1st (6500).....	32

FUEL ECONOMY	
Normal driving, mpg.....	20.0

BRAKES	
Minimum stopping distances, ft:	
From 60 mph.....	145
From 80 mph.....	245
Control in panic stop.....	good
Pedal effort for 0.5g stop, lb.....	15
Fade: percent increase in pedal effort to maintain 0.5g deceleration in 6 stops from 60 mph.....	nil
Overall brake rating.....	very good

HANDLING	
Speed on 100-ft radius, mph.....	33.6
Lateral acceleration, g.....	0.754
Speed thru 700-ft slalom, mph.....	57.5

INTERIOR NOISE	
All noise readings in dBA:	
Constant 30 mph.....	64
50 mph.....	68
70 mph.....	72

SPEEDOMETER ERROR	
30 mph indicated is actually.....	30.0
60 mph.....	60.0
70 mph.....	69.0

