

Volvo Discovers America

...and the fact that the Natives buy horsepower

STOP! BEFORE READING ANY FARTHER, TAKE A LONG, HARD LOOK AT THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE NEW VOLVO 164. Notice anything unusual? Take another good look. Still don't see anything? Neither did we. If you happen to be a Volvo driver, salesman or historian, you will notice that they've changed the front sheet metal to look like a new bunch of other imports rather than the old bunch of other imports. And they really got bold by replacing the obsolete laydown grill with a modern, new, improved, standup grill which comes off looking strangely like a diplomat's shirt.

You see, they've got this new 6-cylinder engine in the Volvo 144 which makes it a 164 (for your edification, non-Volvo owners, the designation means: one each

of a 6-cylinder 4-door sedan, therefore, obviously the 1800S is an 80-cylinder, zero passenger sports car). Anyhow, when they broke down and succumbed to the power-mad public, they discovered there wasn't enough room in front, which meant a lot of sheet-metal-stretching in their hood and fenders. So while they were at it, they distinguished the grill. The result is an increase in overall length of 3 inches, apparently all in the front, and an increase of 4 inches in wheelbase, which is hardly detectable either in driving or appearance.

But otherwise the car is so common you could overlook it in a one-stall garage. As a matter of fact we had to memorize the license number to be able to identify it in a parking lot full of imported cars. It looks like a glass of water.

Take note, we are coining a new phrase.

Henceforth when we refer to a "water-class" car, we mean one of those imported practical cars whose styling nuances are so subtle as to make it practically indistinguishable. It may be as essential as a glass of water, but it doesn't have to be "as plain as."

With all that plainness they must have some pretty strong points to sell, so they seem to be aiming at just those buyers who fall between Volkswagen and Rolls-Royce. That is, they have the same design and sales philosophy, but their market target is somewhat above VW in the price brackets, at about \$4000 for the new 6-cylinder model and down to three grand for the old 2-door, 4-cylinder model.

The similarity to VW and R-R is that Volvo cars are becoming legendary in durability and conservatism. In the durability department we don't have a good two-day test, although their cars have always had an aura of strength and longevity, and they act as though they could verify the claim that the average life span of a Volvo in Sweden is 11 years. Their odometers also reflect this optimism with an extra digit that registers the *hundred* thousand miles. Therefore, for a good report on their durability, keep watching SCG, since we hope to do a 999,999 mile report on this car in about 25 years — when we start doing antique coverage.

Closely related to durability is their emphasis on safety. During those lean years when Detroit decided that safety doesn't sell, Volvo kept beating their cars and their heads against the wall, and were one of the earliest manufacturers to push passenger compartment integrity, controlled-crush front ends, split hydraulic brake systems, shoulder harnesses, 4-wheel disc brakes, and reinforced roof pillars. It may not have paid off in market percentages, but they deserve a big hand just for political and social integrity.

"Bigger on the inside, smaller on the outside." For the first time, we noticed this ourselves before reading it in the press release. In these days of pony-car noses and trunks big enough to camp in (any five people who are going on a trip long enough to require all that baggage space, only need it to get to the airport), the Volvos look like they accidentally got an economy-car nose and tail on a luxury-car living room. And that's just what the interior of this car is. It's not as coarsely huge as a Cadillac — you get all the room you could possibly use and no more — nor does it have the wallowing canoe ride that is practically synonymous with luxury barges. This car was built for people who are not the statistical average, and who want their car to be alterable to their parti-



cular body long-or-shortcomings.

The trick seats almost deserve a story in themselves, as they do more things and have more gadgets than your ordinary dentist's chair — without the apprehension. You might be better off with cliff-hanger seats, though, since we had a tendency to ignore the seat belts just because of the implied security of all that wraparound leather, although we miss the textured, textile-reinforced, ventilated vinyl that decorated the 140 series. And gadgets? There are so many levers and knobs on and around the seat that we worried for fear one might be a canopy jettison and seat-ejection trigger, and felt it safer to stop the car and get out before diddling with any of them. Except that you can't get out without tripping the seat belt lever, which we found rather incon-



venient to latch, and it's not wise to get out without grabbing the parking brake lever, which seems to be in a good position to grab you back when you exit, but doesn't. A knob on the right side of the backrest provides a firm-to-soft adjustment of the cushion springs in the lumbar region (that is a polite euphemism for the "small" of the back, since many people aren't, there), which is much more practical than carrying a pillow on a long trip, and much less suspicious to those who know about the full reclining seat feature. The big lever on the outside of the backrest hinge-point releases a clutch pack that might serve admirably in the driveline of smaller cars, but in the Volvo allows the seat to fall back. That is a warning! We recall hearing of an elderly woman in another make whose backrest collapsed while she was driving, reclining her so fully that she could neither steer nor see where to steer, and the car, impacting at speed, came to rest in under 6 feet — where the lady is now reclining. So if you want to try this feature — and we love it, really — rehearse it while parked. And of course,



VOLVO 164

Continued

there are also the anti-whiplash headrests which are infinitely adjustable with double jam nuts.

If you don't happen to be physically adjustable, the bottom cushion has three positions of altitude and is fully variable "foreign"-aft from Tom Thumb to Jack the Giant. So if you can't get comfortable in this seat, you ought to try out for that fairy tale in which the princess complains of a pea lump under her 20 mattresses.

In our first passenger miles in a Volvo padded-glass-and-steel cell we had a feeling something was missing, but with the realization that all it needed was drapes and an ottoman, promptly fell asleep with the air conditioner and soft music playing — on a downtown LA freeway.

The reason we thought of drapes is the picture-window vision out front. Still-short hood and a high header instills a rather naked feeling behind all that glass. They may not have racy lines, but count our votes for high greenhouse areas.

Before we digress from our road test on Volvo seats, we ought to mention some other interior features. The ribbon speedometer is not a new idea, but it has a moveable pointer (speedometer redline?) for American drivers to set at the speed limit. The turn indicator stalk on the steering stalk is the headlight dimmer also, for the convenience of shorter drivers, and we continually signaled turns with our bright lights. You'd better rehearse that, too. But good news for Volvo owners who are tired of throwing the old flyrod gearshift lever around. Added remote lever linkage has brought the lever back to your hand, and allowed a very short throw. The lever now makes a convenient hand rest, but it is no longer possible to measure engine torque by the amount the lever leans under acceleration.

And she really does accelerate. The quarter-mile times were 2.3-seconds faster than the 142S we tested a year ago, with a low of 17.0 seconds at 86 mph. From a design standpoint the extra performance came rather easily by just adding two cylinders to the old engine. Why not, we hear that it was one of the most durable engines in the world anyhow, and they took extra precautions by beefing or improving such critical fringe areas as clutch, flywheel, camshaft, cooling and oil systems. As usually happens, however, some power was misplaced along the way, and an increase of 50 percent in displacement only resulted in a 33 percent torque increase and a 23 percent horsepower gain. We doubt if there will be any complaints.

Except from mileage watchers, that is. Somehow the addition of those two cylinders and the necessary sheet metal to keep them indoors resulted in a gain of 300 pounds of unnecessary fat. Imagine the horsepower it takes to move 300 pounds of fat through traffic and down the free-

way, and you'll understand the decrease in fuel mileage from an average of 25.5 mpg in the 144S to 21 mpg.

Strangely, however, the front-end ballast didn't seem to hurt handling any. Since the older models were reported to have extreme understeer tendencies, we added about 4 psi extra to the front tires before going out to Digitek Corporation's beautiful new test track at Mira Loma to go roundy-round on their skid pad. Wonder



of wonders! At its maximum lateral acceleration of 0.67 g right and 0.70 g left, the car was so close to steady-state neutral steer, and it felt so controlled, it was like riding a merry-go-round. As you can see from the front/side/rear photographs, the car leaned until it practically lifted its inside hind paw, and those lovely seats had no intention of hanging on to us, so to keep from falling over, we hung on to the wheel until we squeezed the molded plastic right down to the steel core... well, almost. When a car leans like that, you can expect the suspension geometry to get disoriented a bit, so we weren't too upset with a bad pitching condition caused by a very small dip in the track. For racing, a higher roll rate and stiffer shocks would surely solve the problem — and any kind of a nut who would drive a stock car on the streets like we do in a track test deserves to be uncomfortable. At the speeds which we perform our skid pad test, and for that particular coefficient surface, and for production street tires, the Volvo is expending so much horsepower in overcoming friction that, fortunately, there isn't enough left to make throttle



VOLVO 164

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oversteer possible. A situation which was probably intentional, since auto manufacturers have a deadly fear of any handling condition that could be described as "unstable." And stable she is, considering the narrow track and short wheelbase so important to metropolitan drivers.

Yes, history students, we rewrite the books again as we find that America has been discovered by that great Swede, Volvo. They have taken a good and popular small, durable, economy car and made it into the American image of what is *sine qua non* for going to the grocery store, the airport, the show, and picking up the kids; all those exciting and fatiguing trips that necessitate tugboat engines and fingertip control. By adopting this philosophy they had no qualms about also Americanizing the price to \$4000, accurately adjudging the public willing to pay anything for the addition of 30 extra horsepower, electric rear window defroster, real leather and adjustable-height seats with cargo nets on the back, and—we almost forgot—a new power steering by ZF that provides quicker steering and less road-shock transmission, though not quite as light as most other systems.


Fortunately for many people, Volvo is continuing all their other lines, and is not intending the 164 to replace the 144, which we still consider to be an excellent,



Our new animated SAE Standard Seat Gauge illustrates the ridiculous extremes to which Volvo seats can be adjusted.

high quality, small sedan. In other words, they are broadening their line, trying to lure away more big-car buyers, while Detroit is trying to lure away their small-car buyers. It won't be a big battle since Volvo only intends 6000 164s to be imported this year—so get your order in early.

We want to take another last look at the seat before we finish, because it really

grows on you, becoming harder and harder to leave each time, and here comes the part we hate. It happens every time. We just get used to a car, just learn to love it for its good and bad points, and its owners come and take it away from us when they see the last word being put down. See, here comes the end, here they come, and there... it... goes. Snimph. 



PRICE

As tested\$3995
(POE East Coast)

ENGINE

TypeSix-cylinder, in-line,
iron, water-cooled

Head ...Cast iron, removable
Valves ...Ohv, pushrod/rocker
actuated

Max. bhp @ rpm...145 @ 5500

Max. torque163 lbs./ft. @
3000 rpm

Bore3.50 in.
Stroke3.15 in.

Displacement182 cu. in.
(2979 cc)

Compression ratio9.2 to 1

Induction system ..Twin Zenith-
Stromberg CDSE carburetors

Exhaust system6 into 1

Electrical system12 volt,
alternator

CLUTCH

TypeDiaphragm, single
dry disc

Diameter9.0 in.

TRANSMISSION

Type ..Full-synchro, four-speed
Ratios: 1st3.14
2nd1.97
3rd1.34
4th1.00

DIFFERENTIAL

TypeHypoid
Ratio3.31 to 1
Drive axles (type)N.A.

STEERING

TypeCam and roller,
power assist
Turns (lock-to-lock)3.7
Turn circle31.5 ft.

BRAKES

TypeDiscs all around,
dual system
Disc dia.: Front10.7 in.
Rear11.6 in.

CHASSIS

FrameUnitized, welded
BodySteel
Front suspension ..Coil springs,
tube shocks, stabilizer bar
Rear suspension ..Coil springs,
tube shocks, track bar
Tire size6.85 x 15
Tire typeGoodyear

WEIGHTS and MEASURES

Wheelbase106.3 in.
Front track53.1 in.
Rear track53.1 in.
Overall height56.7 in.
Overall width68.3 in.
Overall length185.6 in.

Ground clearance7.1 in.
Curb weight2928 lbs.
Test weight3270 lbs.
Crankcase6.3 qts.
Cooling system13.0 qts.
Gas tank15.5 gals.

PERFORMANCE RESULTS

ACCELERATION

0-302.6
0-404.2
0-506.0
0-608.7
0-7011.8
0-8014.7
0-9020.6
0-10028.9
Standing quarter-mile17.0
@ 86 mph

Top speed, mph108 (est.)

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Test16.0 mpg
Average20-22 mpg

SPEED RANGES IN GEARS

1st0-34
2nd10-54
3rd14-79
4th20-108
Rpm redline5500

BRAKING TEST

Deceleration, average ...0.85g
FadeNone

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

Indicated	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Actual	30	39	49	58	71	82	92	103

