

# Road Test

## VOLVO 164...SWEDEN'S BEST

by Don MacDonald

CAR AT A GLANCE: 112-mph top, zero to 60 mph in 10.5 secs... 6-cylinder, 21-mph economy... Super-luxury seating... 6-digit odometer, and quality to make this instrument realistic.

photos by Lester Nehamkin



*Volvo calls its styling "Swedish Modern" and vows not to change it significantly for five years. U.S. buyers will agree that it's purposeful and timeless.*

Volvo, always behind in their ability to meet demand, have allocated 6000 of the new 164 sedans for the American market and the trick is now to match these cars to 6000 people who have the \$5000 or so necessary to buy this highly specialized product.

It will take a certain special kind of appreciation, much the same, actually, as draws people to the 250 Mercedes except that Volvo doesn't have that mystical 3-pointed star going for them. Other than this, the specifications are rather close whether you're looking at

the machinery or the standards of trim. The fact, though, that the same kind of money will buy a Cadillac Calais almost 40-inches longer and about 2½ times more powerful is why I call the Volvo "specialized."

All you have to do is to visit Las





70-foot radius curve taken at 65-mph produces little lean. Note, though, the obvious understeer which is a desirable characteristic in a low-cube family sedan.



Here the same corner is shot from another angle and by this time the rear wheels are following the front. If you live in a state that allows extra lamps, their placement is apparent.



They are difficult to see, even from the driver's seat, but there are 13 wires imbedded in the rear window to demist or defog it. Trunk holds 23.6 cu. ft. of luggage.



Instrument panel is richly neat although the American distributors would like to switch to round dials. Unlike many imports, the pedals are man-sized.

Vegas or Miami and observe the 10-karat glass rings and mink-dyed rabbit furs that abound to realize why it takes a special kind of character to differentiate between the genuine and Bronx baroque.

On the other hand, I wouldn't argue too much if someone tasked me with the claim that the Volvo 164 wasn't much more than a sort of deluxe Chevy II with leather-upholstered buckets, 4-wheel disc brakes and wood-finished dash. The dimensions, horsepower and capabilities of getting you from New York to San Francisco here, too, are about the same.

There is, though, one big fat difference between a Volvo and a Cadillac, or a Chevy II, or even a Mercedes 250. This difference is personified by an odometer that carries out to six digits or 999,999 miles. That takes guts and also a philosophy that once you've bought your first Volvo, you've bought your last. In other words, those Swedes genuinely believe that the car will outlast you. And this in turn explains their continued reluctance to build a plant capable of mass production.

The Volvo 164 literally exudes quality because you can smell the genuine leather used to cover the seats through the open windows. The doors close with that satisfying clunk normally associated with pre-war custom coachwork. You get the feeling that you're surrounded by a thicker gauge of steel than is used in normal cars but that's not true; it's just the 32 pounds of paint, six-coats thick, used on each car.

The instrument panel, though, is sort of an anomaly and I know that pressure is being applied by the American distributors to correct it, perhaps as soon as 1970. It's beautifully finished but the

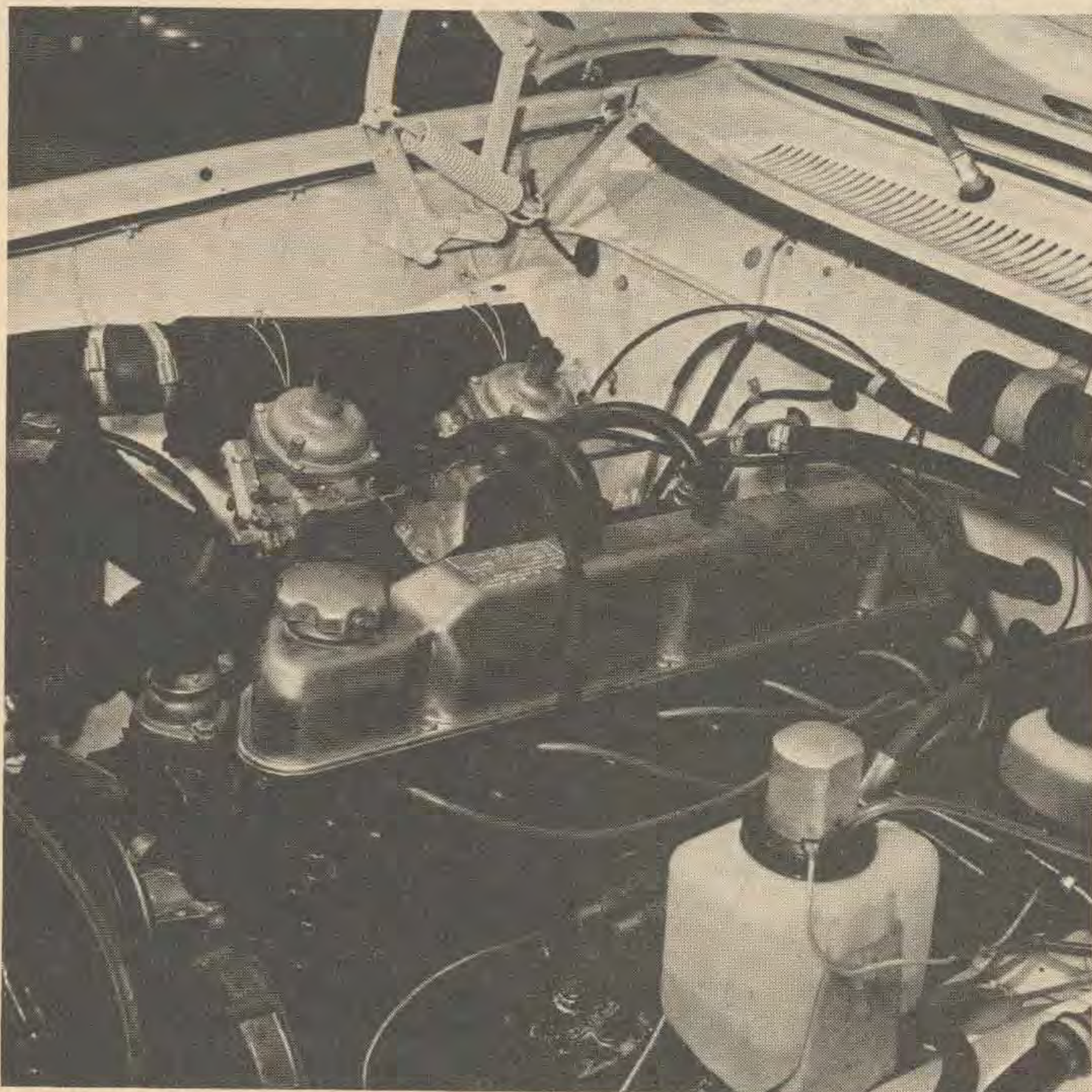




The glove box is a fair-sized reach for the driver but adjacent to it on the left is a handy panel that drops down to reveal every fuse in the car.



Room in the rear compartment shows why the Volvo 164 has won instant popularity with diplomatic missions who want (in fact, must have) luxury with an unostentatious exterior.



Twin Zenith-Strombergs feed the 182-CID, 7-main six. Cooling system is sealed with a fan that is viscous-controlled to go no faster than 3000 rpm.

car, of its nature, cries for nice round Smiths gauges, not a ribbon speedometer and a vague gas gauge where the travel through the 2½ gallon reserve is as great as the top half of the tank. The car should but doesn't have a tach and there is no placement for a clock unless you want to sacrifice the ashtray.

And then the Swedes, and Volvo is no exception, tend to treat safety as though they invented it. Control knobs

are so soft that they feel flimsy and one, the gadget that locks the vent pane, actually is. As to the 3-point safety belts in front, they're fine when adjusted properly but I defy a newcomer to the car to learn the secret at first sitting.

Seating surpasses by far the superior standards already enjoyed by owners of the Volvo 140 and 1800S series cars. The front seats have been called an "orthopedic delight" by a trade publica-

## VOLVO 164

### SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

#### Dimensions and weights:

Overall length: 185.6 ins.  
Overall height: 56.5 ins.  
Overall width: 68.3 ins.  
Track: Front, 53.0 ins.; rear, 53.0 ins.  
Ground clearance: 7.1 ins.  
Weight (curb): 2840 lbs.

#### Engine:

Type: Water-cooled, ohv, in-line six  
Bore & stroke: 3.50 x 3.13 ins.  
Displacement: 182 cu. ins.  
Compression ratio: 9.2:1  
Horsepower: 145 SAE @ 5500 rpm  
Torque: 163 lbs.-ft. @ 3000 rpm

#### Transmission:

4-speed forward synchromesh, one reverse; 3-speed automatic optional

Clutch: Dry, single-plate, diaphragm-spring type

Steering: Recirculating ball and nut, power assisted

Suspension: Independent coil front; rigid axle, coil rear

Brakes: 4-wheel discs, power assisted

Tires: 6.85 x 15, 4-ply rating

Body: Unitized

Accessories: Radio, AM or AM/FM; stereo tape deck; air-conditioning; automatic transmission

tion in the industrial design field. The magazine went on to say: "For the first time in any mass-produced chair, automotive or otherwise, not only is there good lumbar support, but adjustments in the support can be made easily." This is done by a knob on each seatback that alters the tension of the rubber webbing. In addition, the backrests recline to an infinite number of positions and there is eight inches of horizontal travel. About the only item lacking is a center armrest in front as the space for this is pre-empted by both the gearshift knob and the belt releases. To make up for the omission, though, they give you head supports of a civilized size and incorporate in the reclining feature a

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# VOLVO 164

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provision to absorb the shock of a rear-end collision.

Except that you can't diddle with lumbar supports, seating standards in the rear compartment are equally good and there, a center armrest is included. With the front seats at about their mid-point of travel, all that is needed for even six-footers, legroom in the rear is on the order of standard-size American sedans. The 164 has a 4-inch longer wheelbase and 3-inch greater overall length than the 140 series and while some of this went into making room for two extra cylinders, the remainder translates into legroom in the rear.

Volvo calls its styling "Swedish Modern" but one off-shoot of the squarish lines is a truly capacious trunk. Its capacity is listed as 23.6 cu. ft., a figure some six cubes higher than a standard Chevrolet if the Swedes have adopted the American system of measuring useable space. In any case, there's lots of room with the spare accessibly stored on the right-hand side, a well to house an accessory spare gas can and an optional package shelf at the rear for

loose items. The lid contains a light and is counter-balanced by gas-filled cylinders.

The B-30 series 6-cylinder engine with its counterbalanced 7-main crank is new to Volvo but actually, development started concurrently with the more familiar B-20 4-cylinder unit used in 140's and 1800S's so they've wisely made use of many interchangeable parts. Except for the two Zenith-Stromberg carburetors and Volvo's unique pre-heated intake air system that satisfies U.S. emission standards, the engine is quite conventional. You'd almost wish that they spent another \$50 or so to put some fins on the silverized valve cover but then, that is not the Swedish way of doing things. Its 182 cubes are neatly encased but the package will cause no ooh's or aah's in a gas station.

When fired up, though, don't either ooh or aah for otherwise, you won't hear it running. In fact, it is barely audible at the 5500 rpm peak and a 164 owner will spend a lot of time there if he wishes to take advantage of the zero to 60 in 10.5 seconds and 112 mph top — potentials that are honestly claimed by the manufacturer. These parameters really aren't spectacular by American sedan standards, but the love-

ly 4-speed manual box encourages running the car to its limits in every gear. The throw from the solid, stubby knob is positive; my only complaint, it's too long-legged in second to use that as the near-final traffic downshift. A 3-speed automatic is optional for American buyers, but I doubt if many will ask for it.

On freeways or any other piece of smooth cement or asphalt, your only contact with reality is those lumbar supports mentioned earlier. The car is very adept, also, at handling atrocious surfaces. In between, though, it tends to hippety-hop around a bit but again, this judgment must be tempered by the fact that you're always driving at the limit. I don't know what it is about the Volvo syndrome, but it involves one's foot on the floor.

Volvo's literature is rather coy in relating their obvious dedication to safety to the car's rather exceptional performance and handling capabilities. I quote: "We're telling you top speed is 112 mph for only one reason; so you won't try to find out for yourself." Well, I've never met a Volvo driver who *wouldn't* find out for himself and after all, if you go out and pay upwards of \$5000 for a 145-hp six, such excursions,

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# VOLVO 164

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if not legal, are at least innocent.

A 6-cylinder Chevy II might touch 112-mph too, given a favorable tail wind, but the \$3000 difference comes in the cornering. The rather sedate picture of the 164 in action reproduced on these pages actually was taken during a 70-foot radius, 180-degree turn at 65 mph. This would approach a hairpin by West Virginia standards.

The power-assisted, 4-wheel disc brakes are almost impossible to ruffle. I'd just love to enter one of these 164's

in the Union/Pure Performance Trials in any category. I wouldn't come out on top in acceleration and my 21 plus a little mpg wouldn't raise the eyebrows of most Detroit makers of 6-cylinder compacts, but stopping from 60 mph in 131.2 feet without locking wheels and therefore not knocking down any penalty-producing pylons would garner enough points to waltz in the winner.

**Summary:** The Volvo 164 is for the true enthusiast who has outgrown, either mentally or in a family way, his XK-E. For \$5000 and forgetting Cadillacs or Buick Electras, you have a clear choice between this sedan and a Mercedes 250. The Volvo will perform as well and is a great deal less complex to service. ●