

# car

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**NEW**

**RIP  
OFF**

**VOLVO**  
Just Pour on Water

Don't Miss Our  
1.4.4  
OFFER



**Genuine  
Swedish Steel**

THE AUTOMOBILE AS  
A DOMESTIC APPLIANCE



The Automobile as a Domestic Appliance / Volvo is One of Them

# CAR, COOKER AND TELE!

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Photograph/Bob Dowling. Pack/Ten Bob Arts

No longer glamour, temperament and glory. No rust, no problems, good safety, good service—that's what it's coming to. And Volvo has a head start



As we have said in our Giant Tests this month, Volvos are dull, uninteresting, uninspired cars. They are old fashioned from engine right through to suspension but that does not stop their owners from being convinced of their worth. You really have to search hard—as we did—to find an owner who is genuinely discontented. In fact, surveys indicate that not only are the customers satisfied, but that most will back up for another one when the time comes. About 80percent of present owners say they would buy Volvo again and, in truth, about 70percent actually do. That is one of the most impressive repeat-order statistics you will find in the UK!

Just what Volvo are doing at the moment is reaping a harvest. This is the payoff for all those years of pushing safety, reliability, durability, comfort, strength and whathaveyou. Even when safety was as unfashionable as two-wheel brakes Volvo plugged it hard, simultaneously pointing out how their cars were built to last in the rigours of Sweden's salt-laden winters. Today, of course, unless a car is seen to be well made, has a convincing crash-safety background and a recognisably successful anti-corrosion history it is becoming harder to sell. The things we admire and demand in 1973 cars—precise handling, good roadholding, good ride, fast acceleration and the ability to cruise fast effortlessly—are gradually meaning less to Volvo as well as to those who once boasted of being enthusiasts to the core.

The cornerstones of Volvo's plaza of success were laid in good time to cash in on the international awakening to pollution and environment. Just at the moment that socially-aware people were becoming uneasy about the 'trade-in before rust-out' syndrome, Volvo were supplying an answer, complete with fuel injection engines to overcome the exhaust emission bogey.

Mind you, there is nothing new in Volvo's success. It worked before for Volkswagen, and for basically the same reasons. Beetles were once in enormous demand because of their reputation for reliability and durability and for their service network. Eventually, however, Volkswagen came unstuck (although less so in England than in most other countries) when the public got sick of the same model day after day and chucked practicality in favour of desirability, performance and handling.

In its way, the Volvo is a latter day Volkswagen, succeeding now for the same household-appliance reasons. You will recall that the serious motoring correspondents of the era were far from convinced that the Beetle's handling was acceptable, that its noise level was tolerable, and that its performance was

reasonable. But motorists were not buying for those reasons; they wanted the promise of long life and cheap running. Volvo is now doing what the Beetle did, but at twice the price and appealing to the middle-class, middle-income buyer who can find far more points in favour of the Volvo than against it. He feels that the dynamic aspects of the car are far less important in an ever-restricted, ever-more-costly society than the implied promise of longevity when ecological awareness puts waste-making, particularly with costly products, into the same classification as incest.

The Volvo is little more advanced in engineering terms than the Austin A/60, but it earns full marks for timing and its long-term marketing policies. Some other manufacturers who have just as much or more to offer but who have taken a different tack, have good reason to rue the Swedish car's success story. Its rivals needed only a different marketing approach with a change of emphasis, some genuine safety innovation before it became law, more attention to corrosion problems, a crystal ball to know when to exploit the story—and an engineering department with the fortitude to put aside thoughts of new solutions in favour of detailing existing specifications. Given that criteria any maker could have Volvo-type success on his plate. Yet none have!

Deep down, what's really happening is as elementary as a Sherlock Holmes conclusion, yet as subtle as the clues left by arch villains: the magic is going out of motoring, the Toad of Toad Hall in all of us is departing. And the motor car is about to become not so much a relic as a household appliance that will take its place alongside the family refrigerator, tele and washing machine. Many buyers who reveal their reasons for choosing Volvo make this clearly evident.

No intelligent householder would buy a cooker that was not backed by a servicing and spare parts network, reasonable warranty and durability.

A Cortina-owning solicitor who gave us his reasons for ordering a Volvo 145 rather typifies the mood of the moment—and is indicative of the almost self-generating campaign that has boosted Volvo to its current position: 'I like to keep my cars for six or eight years, but it has nearly always been a losing battle against rust.

'The Volvo is a long-term car with a body that will last about the same length of time as the mechanicals, which is the way I want it. It's big and well made and the seats look comfortable.

'I don't get delivery until February, but you have to wait longer than that for some British makes.'

He admitted to being impressed with

the safety aspect, too, and the salesman did not bring up the subject of performance, ride or handling as a selling point. However, he ordered automatic because of the heavy gearchange of the manual transmission version.

Much of the initial Volvo reputation in this country and in the US (the two leading Volvo importers, by the way) was built on the old 120 series, which was still a current model as recently as late 1970. The bigger, grander 140 series, made an initial spurt and many 120 owners duly showed their loyalty by changing over. Quite a few registered disappointment and went back to the 120 range, then imported only as a two-door. The reason was simply that the 120 was a more agile and driveable car compared with the larger, softer and heavier 140. Besides that there were initial troubles with the 140, some of which persisted up until very recent times. For instance, the clutch mechanism was a clumsy, cable operated affair that required very high pedal pressure for disengagement; that has been rectified in the latest series, which has also been given a lower ratio first gear to overcome the clutch troubles encountered with cars driven unsympathetically around town, and to allow cleaner starts from rest when towing a caravan or trailer. The long, willowy gear lever has also been changed to a remote control mechanism that is hardly any lighter.

Volvo is now a very substantial car maker, and has had to employ a large foreign workforce on one-year contracts, just as is happening in Germany and, to some extent, in France. The operation has gained a lot of momentum, so running changes are slow coming as a result, just as they are in all factories.

There is obviously no shortage of Volvo customers. East London's sole Volvo dealer, Hills of London, already do extremely good business but feel they could do better. Mr Erik Parkin, the general manager, is confident he could virtually double his trade: 'We do about 300 Volvos a year, but we could sell twice as many as we get. The 145 estate is the most wanted model of the lot; if we could get them, we could sell more of them than the saloons.'

Volvo Concessionaires admit, however, that a brake is applied to the British market. A spokesman told us: 'Our growth rate is around 40percent and the growth of our servicing and spare parts facility is hinged on this. In a way this is a brake on the market. We will not plan for larger sales growth until we can back it up. On top of this there is a brake applied by the Swedish factory—they just cannot supply more cars than we get now, anyway.'

Nevertheless, a Volvo dealership is a



► profitable operation. A Volvo franchise is almost an automatic way of making money, not just in England but in other parts of the world, too. An Australian Volvo dealer who was passing through London when we were preparing this story told us: 'I'm a dealer for other makes as well, but Volvo is now the main operation for me. Customers don't have to be sold, they simply come in and demand them, pre-sold by the durability/reliability/safety aura that has grown up around Volvo. We don't have much servicing trouble with them and although they are pretty uninspiring to drive they are obviously what people want these days. On the Australian market a buyer can have a big V8-powered Chrysler, Ford or Holden for less money than a Volvo, yet the Volvo is increasing its sales very nicely thank you.'

'I have friends in the motor trade who have had things like British-Leyland dealerships that were sending them broke. They changed to Volvo and got back into the black again. Customers are happy and dealers are happy because Volvo is profitable and you don't have to make bad deals to get the customer to sign up,' he said.

The Lex Group took on Volvo in the UK back in 1958, and, according to a company spokesman, spent the next three years building up a dealer, servicing and spare parts organisation before making a serious effort to sell the product. Indeed, Volvos were thin on the ground then: only 300 or so units—most of them the 120 series—were being imported each year. Lex, who before taking Volvo were British-Leyland distributors, are talking about selling close to 25,000 Volvos in the UK next year, having risen from 21,000 this year and 15,600 the year before.

But while the efficiency of the servicing arrangements are undoubted at this point of time, some of the 175 dealers feel worried for the immediate future. One expressed it well when he told us that he felt the UK concessionaires were putting a brake on the market because the servicing organisation was only just about catering for the 100,000 Volvos already on British roads. 'We don't want a Renault Dauphine situation like we had in the early '60s when the model was flooded onto the market because of its popularity, but without anything like sufficient service back-up.'

'I can say right now that I could not hope to service every Volvo owner in my territory if they were to come to me for service,' he said.

Even if the future could hold its problems on the servicing side, and Volvo's model policy in some ways parallels Volkswagen's of a few years ago, the fact remains that there is little sign of disillusionment among owners. Here's what some of them said about their own Volvo experiences:

## WHAT THE OWNERS SAY



**Mr R C Watson** of Chingford Hatch, London has, like many of the people we spoke to, had more than one Volvo.

In all, three 140 series cars have passed through his hands—one of the first 144 models in the UK which he bought in 1967; a 145 which replaced it in 1970 and now a second 145 which he has been driving for six months.

And Mr Watson is generous in his praise of all three.

'The 144 covered 44,847 miles and hardly gave a moment's worry,' he said. 'It was a very reliable car and I naturally decided to buy another.'

This first 145 put away 34,200 miles at an average of 27.1 miles a gallon according to Mr Watson's comprehensive log book, while the latest single carburettor 145 has now passed the 10,000 mile mark and is giving 28 miles a gallon in manual gearbox form.

'I was originally going to buy one of the 120 series Volvos,' he said, 'but one agent said that spares would be hard to get. Instead I bought a Humber Sceptre and regretted every moment of it.'

Mr Watson finds plenty to like in his Volvos—their finish, safety fittings such as the dual braking circuit, reinforced roof and collapsible steering column, the sealed cooling system and the engine accessibility.

He likes the handling but finds the steering 'very heavy in tight parking places.'

The performance with the single carburettor engine is 'adequate' he says and he will definitely buy another.



**Mrs R Montlake** of Wanstead, London owns a 9000-mile-old automatic 145 estate which she uses as a general shopping carry-all and as transport for up to eight school children and the family beagle.

She previously owned a Fiat 2300 estate and wanted something similar in size. A Peugeot 504 was her first consideration but when she found she could not then get it with automatic she chose the Volvo.

Safety was one of the main reasons for the choice.

'A policeman friend told me that the force would use Volvos if they could but they had to buy British,' she said. 'And several of the other mothers at the school spoke highly of the cars.'

The car came from Edgware Motors in London and was well prepared. A couple of small starting problems which were traced to loose battery terminals, were quickly fixed by the dealer. Otherwise there have been no problems.

She says it is easy to park with its tight turning circle and says its heater is excellent.

Her only real dislike is the small catch on the tail-gate prop which must be released before the rear door will close.





Actor **Hugh Latimer** drives an 87,500 mile old Volvo 1800S and says he would not own any other car.

He swapped his previous 121 Automatic for the car three months ago at a London Volvo agent and says the 1800 will last him 'several more years.'

The 121 was in need of some attention at the time and Mr Latimer considers he got the better end of the deal.

The 121 troubles concerned the automatic gearbox, which he did not like, although the 121 manual he had prior to that was excellent.

Mr Latimer, who drives his Volvos regularly to Spain for holidays, says he has sold five other Volvos to friends as the result of his own happy experiences with them.

**Mr D Percy** of Woodford Green, Essex, is yet another Volvo return customer.

Now on his third car, a 164 overdrive, he previously ran an earlier 164 and before that a 121 estate.

Mr Percy originally bought his first Volvo 'because I was trying to get rid of a Mk IV Ford Zodiac which was in the garage nearly every week, and I got a good trade-in.'

However, after three years and 30,000 trouble-free miles with the 121 he stayed with the marque for his first 164.

He again owned this car for about three years before changing five months ago to a later series 164 in which he has already covered about 7000 miles.

Mr Percy said he could not really fault his Volvos.

'They were utterly reliable and the latest 164 is more comfortable,' he said.

He said he did not know whether he would buy a Volvo again but he would consider an estate model for 'family reasons.'

**Barrister Mr A J N Brunner** of St Johns Wood bought his manual 164 Volvo 18 months ago because of the recommendation of a friend 'and because I planned to keep the car I bought for a while.'

He previously owned a 2600 Alfa Romeo which he thought a beautiful car 'except that it fell to bits.'

However, the gearbox of the Volvo soon became very stiff to operate and at 8000 miles—it has now done 12,000—it was renewed under warranty 'after a battle'. The problem was that the car was out of warranty technically, being more than 12 months old at the time.

Mr Brunner finds the clutch very heavy—'I would buy an automatic if I was to buy another and I don't know whether I would'—but describes the car as 'good on the open road.'

He finds the general finish very good and likes its room but complains of a slightly noisy transmission—he thinks it is the differential—and some gear whine.



This Volvo 145 was one of the first estate models in the UK. When its present owner—who wishes to remain **anonymous**—took delivery in late 1968 the car had already covered 6000 fairly hard miles as a press demonstration vehicle.

Whether as a result of this rather rigorous period or just poor manufacture, the car has proved generally unreliable for much of its 70,000 mile running life.

Used as a work vehicle around London and occasionally on the Continent by a UK firm specialising in antiques, the Volvo's first clutch gave trouble around the 25,000 mile mark and was subsequently replaced.

Its second clutch lasted a similar time and a new clutch operating fork was needed as well when it too was replaced.

At about 30,000 and 64,000 miles, completely new exhaust systems had to be fitted as the result of corrosion.

The engine problems consisted of new rings and bearings at 35,000 miles while at 67,000 miles a pushrod broke and had to be replaced.

Other problems throughout the 70,000 miles include the fitting of three new fuel gauges and a water temperature gauge.

Nevertheless the owner, a prominent London businessman, says he still admires the car's capacity.

'It is comfortable, comparatively safe but unfortunately quite unreliable,' he said. 'And it has been driven quite gently.'

'For that reason I will be forced to sell it soon, and will not consider another.'



London chauffeur **Mr Bert Smith** of Reg Davies Enterprises—private hire agents—has driven the firm's 1968 Volvo 144 for the past two years and reports a new automatic gearbox and exhaust system with just over 46,000 miles on the clock.

The car was bought second-hand as 8000 miles and in all fairness to it, Mr Smith says, it did not have another service until 26,000 miles. At this time the exhaust had to be attended to.

The gearbox has only just been replaced but despite this Mr Smith considers the car generally reliable.

'It stands out in all weathers,' he said, 'and it really does get a hard time around London.'

London caterer **Mr Spencer Gray** bought his manual 145 Volvo 18 months and 28,000 miles ago to 'escape the unreliability of British cars.'

He said he was a little doubtful of Volvo's reliability claims but now has no doubts.

'We bought the car as a 7000 mile old demonstrator from Brooklands as there was a six months waiting list at the time we wanted it,' he said. 'But it has never given a moment's worry.'

Mr Gray said he would certainly buy another Volvo in two years when he planned to change cars again.





Housewife **Mrs G Arthy** of Woodford Green, London, was told she would have to wait six months for her 145 estate two years ago, but a lucky cancellation gave it to her in a fortnight.

Now, with 15,000 miles up, Mrs Arthy has little to complain about except a few rattles and the weak chrome rubbing strips around the waist of the car which she says get caught in automatic car-washes and bend easily.

Her previous car was a Triumph and her choice of the Volvo was purely on its looks as she had heard nothing of the cars beforehand.

'It appeared to be value for money because all the equipment was included in the price while with most British cars everything is an extra,' she said.

Mrs Arthy likes the Volvo's roadholding and does not find the car heavy. She plans to buy another.

**Mr B R Hove**, a Temple Court, London, barrister, bought his Volvo 144 de luxe because he thought from everything that he heard that it was a better car than its opposition.

Moving out of a Zephyr 6, he found the Volvo well prepared, after a six-week wait.

However when he noticed the headlight beams were adjusted too high and asked Volvo Concessionaires to fix them they refused under warranty and charged 45p, which annoyed him.

The car has now done 7500 miles in eight months and Mr Hove is generally happy with it. He finds it a slightly reluctant cold starter.

He is planning to buy another Volvo in a couple of years.

**Mr S Bookatz** of Gants Hill, Essex, is now on his second Volvo—a 90 bhp 144 automatic—and finds it a 'very reliable car—excellent value for money.'

He had a similar 144 manual model for 18 months beforehand and in 20,000 miles he didn't even change a tyre.

'I think I only checked the pressures on about two occasions,' he said.

However, he says he might not buy a third Volvo as he feels by the time it comes around for his next car he might like a change.

He likes the comfort and fuel economy (up to 26mpg around London) but finds the car underpowered for its weight with the single carburettor engine and says the steering is very heavy for parking.

**Mr C A Brightman** of Beckenham bought his first Volvo, a 144 GL automatic, just seven months ago. Now, 9000 miles later, he says it is his last.

Swapping out of a GT Capri because of additions to his family which called for a more spacious boot for prams and pushchairs, he bought the car thinking it would be a sporting four-door, five seater.

'It feels very sluggish despite the fuel injection,' he said. 'And the steering is very heavy—I think power assistance should be standard. I also had ignition-timing problems recently which Smiths of Beckenham haven't yet got right. It will not start correctly.'

'Certainly it is comfortable, but I'd really like to see a different shape and more performance to match the sporty image.'

'It is a little stodgy.'



**Mrs J Piskor** of South Kensington, London, must be considered something of an expert on Volvos. Her metallic bronze 1971 164 overdrive model is the seventh of the Swedish firm's recent products she has owned. In fact it is the third 164 and these in turn followed four 144 four-cylinder models.

Her association with Volvo began when she became disillusioned with the larger models in the VW range. Apart from the Beetle, she considers that the other models in the German range 'could not match their reputation.'

She considered Mercedes-Benz but said the Volvo gave her all the little extras she wanted without the M-B price.

The latest car has now turned over 26,000 miles in just over 18 months—most of them on business trips on the Continent—and should have been swapped for a new 164E but Mrs Piskor decided to keep it another year.

A new clutch at a recent major service is the price paid for the longer ownership but this has been the only major mechanical problem which any of her Volvos have suffered from, she says.

However she is slightly critical of Volvo service.

'It is not very easy to find dealers around London.'

'And most appear overworked and very understaffed. Expensive too. I nearly decided to swap to another make a couple of times because of these

problems.'

Mrs Piskor found one problem on her car early in its life which could prove dangerous to other owners. The wide wheel trims protrude beyond the steel rims and scrape on kerbs when you park too close. 'They are very sharp,' she said, 'and they can turn and cut the valve stem. This happened to three of my tyres before I found out so I had the trims removed for safety.'

Mrs Piskor also feels that Volvo colours are not elegant enough. 'The 164 model should be available in some colours like silver—not the drab shades which they have. The dark blue in particular is bad—it loses all its shine in about a year.' ●