

# Volvo GLT Turbo

The 1980s miracle cure for the automotive blahs is the turbocharger. Volvo applied a dose of it to its staid 4-cylinder engine and turned it into a performer that feels more like a six

by Fred M.H. Gregory





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It's the little things that make you like one car more than another; the accumulation of thoughtfully and cleverly executed details that tells so much about the attitudes of the people who designed and built the car and a lot about the car itself. It is a fair assumption that if the small stuff is handled well, so is the big stuff.

I almost missed the detail that caused me to look at the new Volvo GLT Turbo coupe with a clearer and more appreciative eye. Bob Austin, Volvo's public relations guy, pointed it out to me with some reluctance. He was leery of ridicule, it was such a small thing. He crawled into the back seat, folded down the armrest, and revealed a flap that covered an oval-shaped hole, about 10 inches across on its long axis. It opened into the trunk. "It's for storing long things like skis, two-by-fours or whatever," Austin explained.

"Cute," I said. "Just the thing for six-foot submarine sandwiches." Actually, I liked the mini-hatch; it seemed useful and very probably cost close to nothing to provide.

How useful I soon found out. During a particularly hectic photo session, I locked the keys to the car in the trunk. Yes, it was one of those moments when you give yourself a shot in the forehead with the heel of your hand and then say, "Idiot!"

I was about to sink into despair when I remembered the mini-hatch. I hadn't locked the car's door, so I could get at it. With a bent coathanger yanked from my luggage, and the light of a match, I soon fished the keys out of the trunk and muttered grateful thanks to the anonymous soul in Sweden who thought of adding a small dimension to the luggage-carrying capacity of Volvo coupes.

Until that point, I tended to look at this new car from Volvo with less than ardent enthusiasm. Volvo's cars are like Ma Bell's phones: solid, reliable, there when you need them, full of praiseworthy virtues, but lacking the quality that quickens the pulse or appeals solely to the senses. They're supposed to be cars for people who think—professors, intellectuals and the like—and maybe they

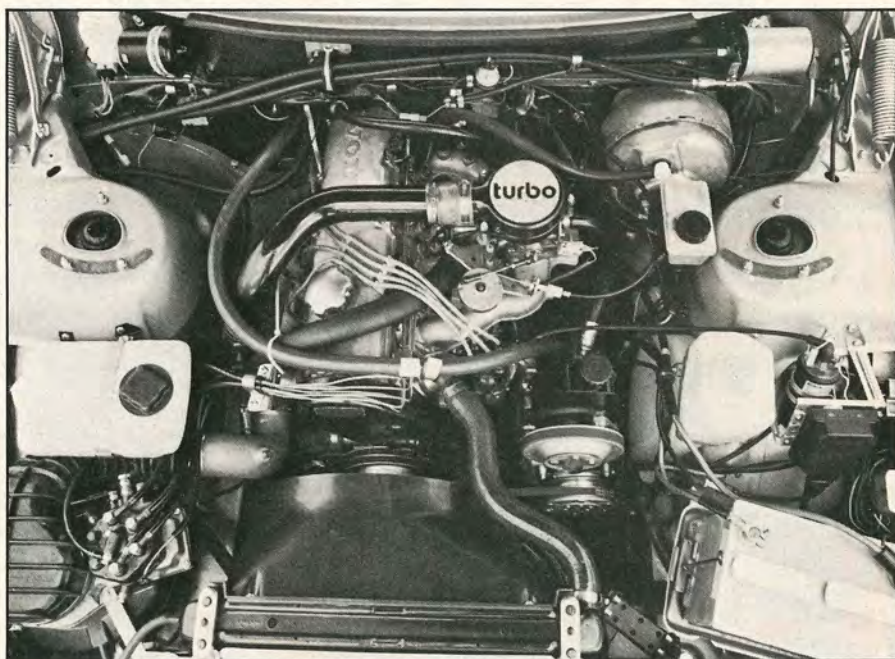
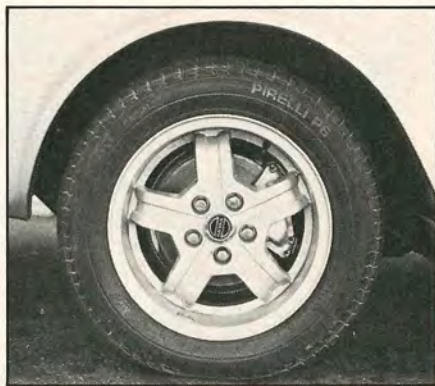
are. But, like these people, Volvos sometimes seem too weighed down with introspection and serious purpose.

I decided not to think so much about the Volvo, and to just experience it.

The GLT Turbo is a variation of the familiar Volvo coupe that's been around in this country since 1976. It has been changed by the swapping around of some sheet metal with other models and by some original touches. The hood and grille come from the striking chopped-top Bertone coupe, giving the nose of the car

a more aggressive look. The headlights are now square with a halogen hi-beam lamp. The rain gutters have been redesigned for better aerodynamic efficiency and reduced noise, and a black stripe has been applied to the door sill and rear window line to enhance the large-green-house look.

The blackout rocker panel carries this motif further, as does the broad, black side trim spear along the car's waistline. The striping of last year's coupe has been retired in favor of a cleaner appearance,





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and the taillights have been redesigned to provide a wider appearance for the rear deck.

On the inside, there's a new dashboard and instrument panel, and in the case of the turbo (though not other GLT models), the bucket seats have been recontoured to increase their grip.

There's also a spoiler beneath the bumper, metallic paint and a standard sunroof. The turbo package comes with power windows, power steering, electrically operated outside mirrors, air conditioning and power antenna as standard items.

About the only option is a choice of a number of radios.

Mechanically, there's a special handling package that includes heavier anti-sway bars and springs as well as gas-filled shock absorbers. Pirelli P6 low-profile tires, mounted on 5-spoke alloy wheels, add considerably to the cornering ability of the GLT.

The engine is Volvo's sturdy and smooth 2.1-liter inline 4-cylinder. The block is iron, and the single-overhead-camshaft cylinder head is aluminum. To accommodate the Garrett TBO3 turbo-

charger, which has the waste gate built into it to ease packaging, compression ratio has been lowered from 9.3:1 (in the normally aspirated version of the engine) to 7.5:1. Except for tuning adjustments to the Bosch CIS fuel injection and a breakerless solid-state ignition, the engines are essentially identical, though the turbo version cranks out 20 additional horsepower. Both use a Lambda sond/catalyst emission control system, which, naturally, requires unleaded gasoline.

Under the hood, the turbo package is very well laid out and executed with easy accessibility for maintenance and no crowding of components.

The purpose of the turbocharger, of course, is to improve performance without impairing gas mileage, and the GLT does the job well.

We were fortunate to be able to compare both the turbo and normally aspirated (NA) cars at Englishtown dragstrip in New Jersey. The differences were readily apparent.

The turbo, because of its lower compression ratio, was a bit more sluggish off the line though wheelspin was easy to induce, but as the tachometer eased past the 3000 rpm mark, the rate of acceleration increased noticeably. The turbo was nearly 3 seconds quicker in reaching 60 mph, an advantage it carried right through the mid-range, when it dropped off slightly. Over the quarter-mile distance, the turbo held about a 2-second lead. According to EPA figures, the difference in mileage between the two engines is only about 1 mpg; a better example of the efficacy of turbocharging is hard to find.

Hard, rapid gear shifting posed no difficulties, though the shift pattern could be a little tighter. And, the GLT turbo covered the acceleration range smoothly with little noticeable turbo lag; that became apparent only at cruising speeds, when it took the turbo a moment to start huffing, but this is a trait of all turbo cars.

The car's braking proved excellent. Each stop was straight and true, the 4-wheel discs grabbing with predictability and consistency. The Pirelli tires must share the credit for this.

With formal testing out of the way, the GLT was put through some concentrated road work, nearly 1000 miles, which included the bombed-out streets of the South Bronx, twisty country roads and easy-rider interstates.

Under all conditions, the car is a pleasure to drive. First off, it fits well. The wide doors and high roof allow for easy entry to both the front and rear seats. The driver's share of the room is spacious and unconfining. The new bucket seats keep your spine at the proper angle and give side support in turns without seeming overly tight and confining. Adjustability is through a broad range, and the seat belts are comfortable and easy to use. There are no controls beyond easy reach, and there's a narrow, flexible tray in the





middle of the dash for conveniently stowing change, pens, pencils and other small things that are normally out of reach when you need them. Another one of those nice Volvo details.

The redesigned dash groups all the gauges in front of, and in easy view of, the driver. In addition to the usual full array of dials, including speedometer, tachometer and oil pressure, ammeter and temperature gauges, there's an easy-to-read turbo boost gauge that lets you adapt your driving to suit the blower, a knack which should be mastered by anyone wanting to get complete efficiency from a turbo.

The steering wheel affords a firm grip and is of a well-proportioned diameter. Power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering makes low-speed maneuvering easy yet retains enough road feel and sensitivity to assure the impression of control at higher velocities.

Visibility is virtually unimpaired in all directions, and because of the car's large windows, there's a feeling of airiness to the interior.

By today's standards, the GLT is no longer a small car. It comes closer to being, say, standard-sized. This does not, however, diminish its maneuverability or make it hard to park. The car acquitted itself admirably in the desperate cut-and-thrust driving necessary to make progress on the streets of Manhattan. In less congested surroundings, and being pushed toward its limits, the GLT tended toward a slight, nose-heavy understeer, but it wasn't that pronounced. Under normal use, the car stayed flat and neutral in cornering and was agile enough to be fun to drive without half scaring you to death.

Its highway behavior is polite. The ride is neither pillow soft nor oak hard. There's no wander, and with the cruise control locked on, the GLT is as pleasant a touring car as there is around. Overdrive is easily flicked in by means of a switch in the shift handle (it automatically clicks off when you downshift), and the ride is quiet, smooth and easy to take. There's nothing about the car to induce fatigue on a long trip.

At a price of around \$14,000, the GLT Turbo is not cut-rate, but that compares favorably with other cars in its class, particularly if you consider its complement of standard items. It is a clean, efficient, well-done package that delivered 20 mpg on one leg of our test, which included city driving and high-speed cruising. On another portion of the trip, all over interstates and at legal speeds, the mileage rose to 25.

Still, there's something bland about the car. It isn't particularly stylish, nor does it bristle with the kind of high-tech stuff we're seeing a great deal of today. It is, in a word, conservative, in spite of its turbo and black-on-black cosmetics. That's not a criticism, though, just an observation. And being conservative is something that seems to be gaining favor today. (MT)

# ROAD TEST DATA

## Volvo GLT Turbo

### SPECIFICATIONS

#### GENERAL

Vehicle type	Front-engine, rear-drive, 5-pass., 2-door coupe
Base price	\$13,630
Options on test car	AM/FM cassette stereo radio
Price as tested	\$14,017

#### ENGINE

Type	Turbocharged inline four, water cooled, cast iron block, aluminum head, 5 main bearings
Bore & stroke	3.68 x 3.2 in./92 x 80 mm
Displacement	130 cu. in./2.08 liters
Compression ratio	7.5:1
Fuel system	Bosch CI electric with Garrett TBO3 turbocharger
Recommended fuel	91 octane unleaded
Emission control	Lambda Sond catalyst
Valve gear	SOHC
Horsepower (SAE net)	127 at 5400 rpm
Torque (lb.-ft., SAE net)	150 at 3750 rpm
Power-to-weight ratio	24.1 lb./hp

#### DRIVETRAIN

Transmission	4-speed manual w/overdrive
Final drive ratio	3.73:1

#### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	104.3 in.
Track, F/R	56.3/53.5 in.
Length	192.5 in.

Width	67.3 in.
Height	53.9 in.
Ground clearance	4.3 in.
Curb weight	3065 lbs.
Weight distribution, F/R	53/47%

#### CAPACITIES

Fuel capacity	15.8 gals.
Crankcase	4.7 qts.
Cooling system	11.5 qts.
Trunk capacity	13.7 cu. ft.

#### SUSPENSION

Front	MacPherson struts, coil springs, stabilizer bar
Rear	4-link live axle, Panhard rod, coil springs, stabilizer bar

#### STEERING

Type	Power-assisted rack and pinion
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Turns lock-to-lock	3.5
Turning circle, curb-to-curb	32 ft. 2 in.

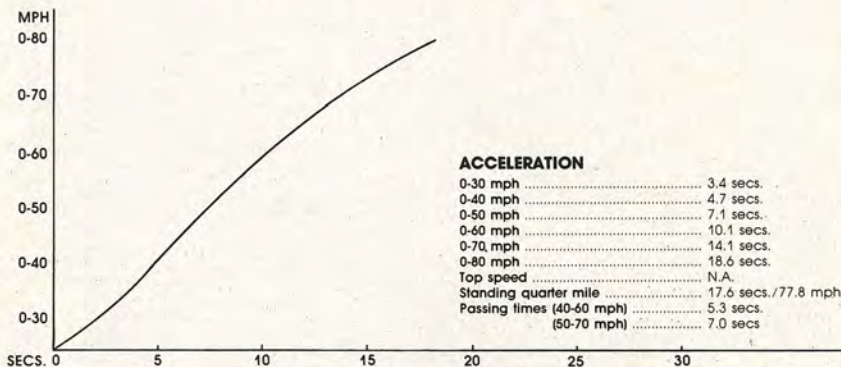
#### BRAKES

Front	10.3-in. vented discs
Rear	11-in. solid discs

#### WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size	6 x 15 in.
Wheel type	Alloy
Tire make and size	Pirelli P6 195/60 HR15
Tire type	Steel-belted radial
Recommended pressure (psi), F/R	N.A.

## TEST RESULTS



#### FUEL CONSUMPTION

EPA City	18 mpg
MT 73-mile test loop	N.A.

#### SPEEDOMETER

Indicated	30	40	50	60
Actual mph	28.4	39	49	58

#### BRAKING

MPH	30-0	60-0
FEET	39 ft.	161 ft.

