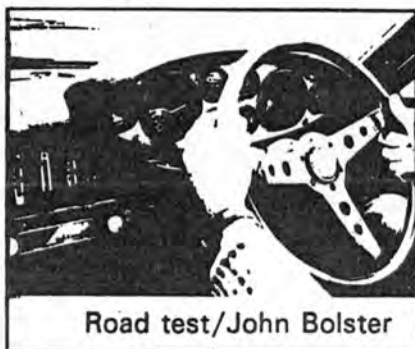


Though I tested the big 3-litre Volvo with fuel injection last year, I was only able to obtain one with automatic transmission at that time. The present test concerns the car with a manual gearbox and overdrive and though the increase in performance is not great, it is sufficient to put this substantial Swedish saloon among the really fast touring cars.

Most Volvo owners do not make their choice for reasons of performance. I got into conversation with some of them and invariably they had bought their cars because they would last a long time and would remain free from rust. The 164 E has all the traditional Volvo toughness but its speed, acceleration, and refinement are something quite new for this make. The immensely sturdy in-line



Road test/John Bolster

Volvo's 3-litre: a plain hard working car, but quick

six-cylinder engine has been endowed with quite an exciting camshaft compared with the carburettor version but, as is often found with a really efficient fuel-injection system, the low-speed torque remains outstanding.

The design of the chassis is completely orthodox, with wishbones in front and a well-located live axle behind. There are hefty disc brakes all round and the cam and roller steering gear has a strictly limited degree of power assistance, for too much is most undesirable on Scandinavian ice. The roomy 4-door body has a large boot, though luggage has to be lifted fairly high when loading up.

The front seats have an extra adjustment to shape the squab to the small of the back but the lateral location could be better. A very tall driver might like a bit more adjustment and the steering wheel is rather far back for those who prefer to stretch their arms. One sits well up with a good all-round view and the gearlever is well placed.

The engine starts at once, hot or cold, idling reliably as it warms up. It is at once obvious that the acceleration is something out of the ordinary, which is all the more impressive because the car looks so sedate. The gear

ratios allow high maxima to be obtained, second being good for 60 mph and third for 90 mph, if the rev-counter needle is allowed to touch the red section for a moment. Under normal touring conditions, the gearchange is satisfactory, but the synchromesh balked strongly when I was taking the acceleration figures, unavoidably showing my changes.

As well as being smooth and flexible, the engine is also very quiet. Yet, the way in

which it can push this massive, square saloon along never ceases to amaze one. On dead level roads, the direct top gear is faster than the overdrive and will produce a timed 116 mph with the rev-counter nudging the red, at 6000 rpm, while the speedometer claims 122 mph. Though the overdrive normally holds the engine down below 4500 rpm, a down-grade or a helpful puff of wind may allow the speed to build up in a most gratifying manner. However, the engine is so smooth that the overdrive is really unnecessary in England, though its use may be worthwhile to curb a fairly healthy thirst for fuel. On the continent, it permits a silent 110 mph gait that is truly delightful.

The car which is the subject of the present test produced more wind noise than the earlier one and road noise was audible on certain surfaces. Nevertheless, the overall effect was pleasingly quiet and certainly above the average. The roadholding benefits from the larger-section tyres which go with the fuel injection model. It represents a good compromise for a car with a live rear axle, with a moderate degree of understeer and a satisfactory ride on good surfaces, though there is some wallowing when bad roads are taken fast. The steering is excellent, making parking and other low-speed manoeuvres easy without blunting the sensitivity on slippery surfaces.

Though the 164 E can be thrown around by an exuberant driver, it may be best enjoyed when driven a little below its limit. The brakes cope remarkably well with the considerable weight and can be used hard and frequently without any sign of fading. Perhaps the best way to regard the big Volvo is as a comfortable and dignified car with a fierce surge of acceleration in reserve, but it is always ready to put 100 miles into the



The 164 E can be thrown around by an exuberant driver, but its outward appearance makes it a wolf in sheep's clothing.



hour on the autoroutes.

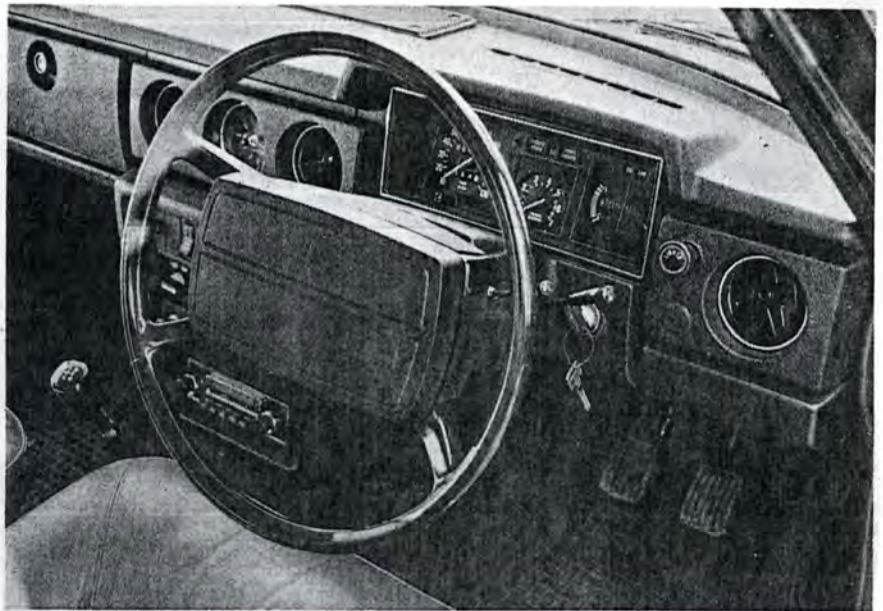
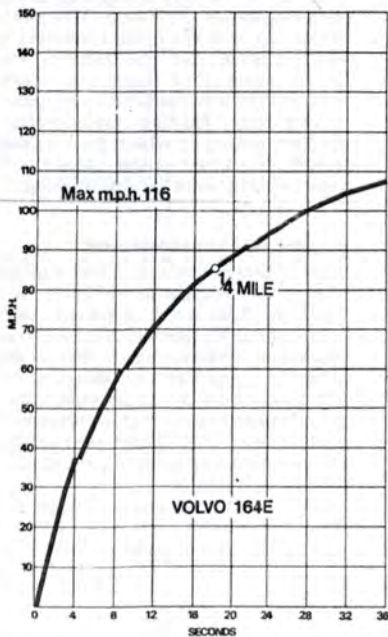
It is curious that a car with so many practical features as the Volvo should have a ventilation system which is most unsatisfactory. Last year's car had no controllable cold air inlets at all. This one has no less than four, large and adjustable in all directions, but instead of having a fresh air duct they are simply piped to the heater. In Sweden, hot breathing air may be acceptable but here it is useless. If the heater is operating, the breathing air suffocates the occupants, the alternative being frozen feet!

This is the only major fault of the 164 E. It would be easy to ask for a more advanced chassis design or a body with more spectacular styling, but the typical Volvo customer is scarcely interested in such things. He wants a car that will resist snow, ice, and salt—that will clean up like new after being dirty for months, yet will also have an air of quality about it. It will set off for the Shires with a horsebox at its tail or to the Riviera with a big boat behind. It's a plain, hardworking car, but remarkably quick when the road is clear and the driver is in the mood.

The 3-litre Volvo engine is a fine piece of engineering and in fuel-injection form it is as powerful as it is smooth. Perhaps the manufacturers will one day put it to work in a car that is light and compact to demonstrate its sporting qualities, for the Swedish horses that it produces certainly pull their weight. Nevertheless, even when propelling a big four door saloon it gives an impressive performance and if the car seems expensive to some, the faithful Volvo enthusiasts know what they are paying for, and are happy to do so. I hesitate to perpetuate a cliché, which has been used far too often, but this really is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

SPECIFICATION AND PERFORMANCE DATA

Car tested: Volvo 164 E 4-door saloon. £2914.81 (including VAT)
Engine: Six-cylinders, 88.92 mm x 80 mm (2978 cc). Compression ratio 10 to 1. 160 bhp (net) at 5500 rpm. Pushrod-operated overhead valves. Bosch electronic fuel injection.
Transmission: Single dry plate clutch. 4-speed all synchromesh gearbox with central change and Laycock overdrive, ratios 0.797, 1.0, 1.340, 2.120 and 3.450 to 1. Hypoid rear axle, ratio 3.73 to 1.
Chassis: Combined steel body and chassis. Independent front suspension by wishbones, coil springs, and anti-roll bar. Power-assisted recirculating ball steering gear. Live rear axle on twin pairs of trailing arms, Panhard rod, and coil springs. Telescopic dampers all round. Servo-assisted disc brakes with auxiliary drums for hand brake. Bolt-on disc wheels fitted 185/70-15 radial ply tyres.
Equipment: 12-volt lighting and starting. Speedometer. Rev-counter. Fuel and water temperature gauges. Clock. Heating, demisting, and ventilation system with heated rear window. 2-speed windscreen wipers and washers. Flashing direction indicators. Reversing lights. Radio (extra).
Dimensions: Wheelbase 8 ft 10 1/4 in. Track 4 ft 5 1/4 in. Overall length 15 ft 5 1/4 in. Width 5 ft 8 1/4 in. Weight 1 ton 6 1/2 cwt.
Performance: Maximum speed 116 mph. Speeds in gears: Overdrive top 112 mph. Third 91 mph. Second 60 mph. First 37 mph. Standing quarter-mile 17 s. Acceleration: 0-30 mph 2.9 s. 0-50 mph 6.5 s. 0-80 mph 8.8 s. 0-100 mph 15.5 s. 0-100 mph 28 s.
Fuel consumption: 17 to 21 mpg.



One sits well up with good all-round view and the gearbox is well placed. The synchromesh baulked strongly when taking acceleration figures.



The immensely sturdy in-line six cylinder engine has been endowed with quite an exciting camshaft.

