

THE VOLVO 144 AUTOMATIC

By JOHN TAYLOR

THE Volvo 140 series, comprising the 142 and 144 saloons and the 145 estate cars in varying forms, has been a highly successful import to the UK market since its introduction here in 1967. Despite the state of the market, the company increased their penetration in 1969 by 12 per cent with a total of 7,400 cars, mainly of the 140 series. I was particularly conscious of this during my period of time with the 144 automatic last month, when I was struck by the number of 144 and 145 cars that I encountered. One always tends to notice other cars of the type currently being driven, but in this instance it was quite remarkable. The percentage of 145 estates was particularly high.

Initially, the 142 two-door, 144 four-door and 145 (five-door) estate were powered by a 1,778 c.c. engine, but in October, 1968, this was replaced by the current B20 series of two-litre capacity. Designed to give ample torque at lower speeds, it has overhead valves and a five-bearing crankshaft. It is available in standard form with a single Stromberg carburettor, giving 90 b.h.p., or in the "S" series with twin Strombergs to give 118 b.h.p. Particular attention has been paid to exhaust emission and the pre-set and sealed carburettor and positive crankcase ventilation keep this to an acceptable level to meet the stringent US regulations.

The construction of the steel chassis-body integral structure is extremely strong and rigid, and designed with safety very much in mind. In addition, the pre-treatment and finish of the bodywork is intended to protect it against the ravages of winter for many years. Exposed parts are hot-dipped galvanized and other parts rust-proofed before welding, and then the completed shell is phosphated and completely immersed in primer. The lower area is treated to more anti-rust paint and then the whole is primed, filled and triple finished. The complete process involves some 33 lb. of paint and contributes to the long life that Volvos generally enjoy. The underside is sealed against stones and grit, and sound deadening material within the body does not absorb moisture. Bright metal on the exterior is largely of anodised aluminium, including the front grille and the bumpers, which incorporate full-width butyl rubber inserts.

Whenever possible, I try to find time to wash a car under test as it generally reveals quite a lot about the construction. With the 144, I did manage this and found the smooth lines easy to maintain and quick to drain off, with no moisture traps apparent.

The smooth lines of the Volvo are functional and neat without being outstandingly eye-catching. This has the advantage of making them acceptable to the widest possible public and ensuring that they are unlikely to date rapidly. The 144 is quite a good-size car in the medium range with a length of 15 ft. 2 in. as against the 14 ft. 8 in. of the Vauxhall Victor, 14 ft. 10 in. of the Rover 2000 and the 15 ft. 1 in. of the Triumph 2000. It is a comfortable 4/5-seater endowed with one of the most spacious luggage boots in its class I can recall. The stated capacity is 14 cubic ft. and this is all usable with the exception of the space occupied by the vertically disposed spare wheel (space is allowed on the opposite side for a second spare if required). The loading edge of the boot is high for lifting the full amount of luggage and the lid was decidedly heavy on the test car.

The passenger compartment has four doors which open wide and feel surprisingly light, yet shut with a satisfying "clunk". The opening quarter lights have screw-up thief-proof catches, and the doors have recessed interior catches above well-shaped armrests-

cum-handgrips. The individual front seats are wide and comfortable, with very generous fore-and-aft adjustments, folding cushions and adjustable lumbar area support operated by a knurled knob. The trim is in a decidedly cold-feeing plastic, but an innovation for 1970 is the incorporation of adjustable headrests. These can be easily removed to enable shorter drivers to have a clear view when reversing. I appreciate the safety that they bring in the event of an accident, and the comfort for the passenger, but I think for drivers the climate of opinion in this country still strongly favours low-backed seating.

Volvo fit their own safety belts which clip between the front seats on a floor-mounted fitment from which they are released by individual trip levers. The design is patented and the manufacturers state that they can be released even if the driver is trapped upside

144's two-litre unit and for the auxiliaries.

The car tested was fitted with the Borg-Warner 35 automatic three-speed transmission, just one of many British components on the Volvo; the company spends £21 million with the British motor industry annually (some other equipment, such as the Bosch electrics, is German). This is operated by a left-hand steering column lever with indicator on the fascia. With the selector on drive, all three gears are used and changes are smooth, though perceptible. It is well-suited to the characteristics of the B20 engine, which revs freely, though with a whine on kick-down acceleration and at higher speeds.

Noise level generally is low, showing good attention to insulation. Steering is definitely heavy at low speeds for the smaller driver, but this apart, handling is good with a comfortable ride. The brakes are surefooted and have a



A SWEDISH SALOON WITH MANY BRITISH COMPONENTS. "The Volvo Company spends £21 million annually with the British motor industry"

down, though happily no opportunity arose to try them in this position during my test.

Even with the front seats well back, rear seat leg-room is good and three occupants can travel without being cramped unduly. Another improvement for 1970 is in the heating and ventilation system which now induces more heat or, alternatively, cooled air to the front and rear floor outlets. There is an air outlet at the base of the rear window. The controls of the heater are unusual, consisting of three slim vertical notched discs recessed into the fascia with only part of the rim showing. These are coloured and illuminated internally at night so that accurate control can be maintained in the dark with minimum of distraction. The whole system works rapidly and very efficiently, as might be expected of a car geared for arctic conditions. This, combined with the rear window heater (75 or 150 watts according to requirements) soon made the car habitable after standing in the below-zero temperatures during a recent cold spell. The Volvo also started first time on those mornings, yet rather to my surprise the difficulty was in getting into the car with locks frozen solid; the boot lock was alone in having a keyhole cover.

Other interior features include a strip-type speedometer with a sliding indicator to act as a visual reminder of the prevailing speed limit, a hazard warning light, panel light dimmer, trip recorder and an odometer reading to 999,999 miles, indicating quiet confidence in the longevity of the model. The engine compartment takes the three-litre engine on the similar 164 model, so that there is ample working room available for the

dual circuit system ensuring braking on three wheels in the event of a circuit failure.

Volvo Concessionaires have 200 dealers and distributors to back their imports, which are free of duty, coming from the EFTA area, and the 144 represents good value combined with an exceptionally long life-expectancy.

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Concessionaires: Volvo Concessionaires,
18 Great Marlborough St., London, W1.

SPECIFICATION

Price	£1,632	Suspension:	
(including PT £384)		Front: Independent coil	
Cubic capacity	1,986 c.c.	Rear: Coil and trailing	
Bore and stroke	88.9 x 80 mm.	arm	
Cylinders	4 in-line	Wheelbase:	8 ft. 6.4 in.
Valves	Overhead	Track (front)	4 ft. 5.1 in.
B.h.p.	90 at 4,800 r.p.m.	Track (rear)	4 ft. 5.1 in.
Carburettor	Stromberg 175CD-2	Overall length	15 ft. 2.7 in.
Ignition	12-volt coil	Overall width	5 ft. 8.3 in.
Oil Filter	Full-flow	Overall height	4 ft. 9.3 in.
1st gear	2.39 to 1	Ground clearance	7.7 in.
2nd gear	1.45 to 1	Turning circle	30 ft. 4 in.
3rd gear	1.00 to 1	Weight	23 cwt.
Final drive	Hypoid bevel (4:1 to 1)	Fuel capacity	12.75 gall.
Brakes	Girling hydraulic disc (servo-assisted)	Oil capacity	6.6 pints
		Water capacity	15 pints
		Tyres	Pirelli Cinturato (165 x 15)

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration		Max. speed	95 m.p.h. (estimated)
30-50	8.5 sec.	Petrol consumption	
40-60	10.3 sec.	23 m.p.g. overall	
0-70 (all gears)	20.5 sec.	Brakes	30 to 0 in 31 ft. (97 per cent efficiency)