

CARS THESE DAYS seem mostly to be sheep in wolves' clothing instead of the Biblical reverse, the way it should be. Sheep are really not very interesting except to their mothers, their shepherds, kinky Scotsmen and heavy consumers of Mutton like the Arabs who also eat the eyeballs, you see. Now wolves in sheep's clothing (in a motoring sense) used to be called Q Cars; a bit more common before said Arabs stirred up all this petroleum business as all the world loves a surprise especially Count Zborowski with a Maybach zep engine in his Merc tail job, Chrysler Hemis in Henry Js, roller-bearing Porsches in VW buses und zo weiter. Doubleknocker Abarth two liters in Fiat 600s really don't qualify as too obvious. Nobody in his right mind is going out to drag something that lifts one whole side off the ground going ahunga ahunga and which Hans Herrmann is afraid to drive.

Volvos make good Q Cars as they errrrr hardly project the sporting image of an AG6S Maserati for reasons beyond the scope of this article. In their big rallying days, Volvos were often seen flitting between (and into) the pine trees of Sweden with great velocity but in recent years the factory has had sort of a pursed-lip attitude towards this sort of activity, probably because it doesn't suit the Image. However Uncle Gunnar and his little men still live at Göteborg and haven't forgotten all

their old tricks. We were therefore pleased to be offered a live wolf by Bob Sinclair of Volvo Western, said beast being sort of rolling salesroom for comp goodies that VolWest peddles as well as support wagon for rallies here and in Mexico. The basic device started life as a Swedish postal van, usually bright yellow with Svenska Flygpost on it, and looks rather like a high-top 145 station wagon because that's what it is. There was a rather limited run of these and somebody decided to whip one off the line to tweek it up. The Editor may print the spec sheet but if not, dimensions are about the same as the 145 barring height, naturally, track wider by 6 in. because of special alloy wheels and gigantic Pirellis, and curiously enough it's heavier by 164 pounds. The engine is Uncle Gunnar's Rally Stage 4 and has all the usual things done to it plus a few more besides including overbore to 2.2 liters, boost of compression to 10.5:1, bigger and better valves, lightened valve gear, Molelec black box, steel timing gears etc and a couple of double-throat 45-mm Solex carbs. Oh yes the camshaft is a Rally high lift one. The gearbox got a set of close-ratio gears plus overdrive on top and for good measure enjoys all needle bearings inside. The flywheel went down from 21 to 14 lb (!), there is a limited-slip diff, and all sorts of trick stuff is installed including enough lights for a 747 and also enough instruments



VOLVO EXPRESS

Våt a våy to shåg pårts

BY HENRY N. MANNEY III

PHOTOS BY JOE RUSZ



for same, including one of those neat dials that tells you if ice is forming on the road. Also useless in Orange Co. is a portable shower bath in the back but you can always fill it with akvavit.

Sinclair is proudest of the suspension mods and as a Volvo 145E owner I can agree with him. My car has the shorter, stiffer rally springs and Bilstein shocks and even four up with baggage around the Nürburgring it never bottomed. The "Express" goes a step further with 25-mm front anti-roll bar (stock 16 mm) and 20 mm on the back. This is attached to the body by solid mounts and transmits a good deal of road noise; 1975 Volvos have a different model which is mounted differently and supposed to be quieter. They finished up a hip-hugging Recaro bucket for the driver, a P1800 seat for the passenger, tiny steering wheel, a fancy paint job and black carpet all over the cavern in back so that oil stains won't show, apparently, or so you can't find the little lockers in the dark. Fenders are stylishly flared to clear the big Pirellis, there is a reindeer catcher on the front, and a nod to comp practice is made with a fiberglass bonnet even if the stock fiberglass rear door weighs as much as the rest of the car.

We approached this thing with a jaundiced eye as full Rallye Stage 4 is not exactly the rig for traffic like downtown Paris



and besides there are more cops around here than ants at a picnic. Starting was no trouble after owning Alfa Veloces and the like and besides most cars won't start these days because they are too b****y leaned out; you just give a pump on the accelerator and it fires right off. The clutch I think was on its way out after a lot of hard usage so that its pedal had to be depressed fully to get full engagement in the lower gears; aside from that the gearbox worked very well as Volvo manual boxes do. So we trundled off with the engine making nice gargling noises rumble rumble spit rumble spit as it wasn't on the cam yet and we were wondering how long the cold Bosch 290 R 16 plugs were going to put up with this; in fact I had brought a plug wrench along as Most Likely To Be Needed On Voyage. Actually it wasn't too fussy and not terribly cammy either, a bit of a relief as nobody likes it to feel like a bowl of tapioca below 5 thou and then suddenly take off like a rocket in front of the Town Clown. Likewise the exhaust wasn't noisy, being made up of glass packs instead of the usual brewery plumbing.

This isn't to say that the Volvo Express idled along like a stock Daf with four nuns inside. Normal traffic driving with its generous quota of reaganlights did tend to load up things a bit (not to the extent of serious bother) but when out in the back country a bootful would produce some missing up

Our Esteemed Scribe ponders Uncle Gunnar's Stage 4 Rallye motor, prays for hot water from the built-in shower, hunts for Göteborg Gold in the many covered recesses of the Volvo Express. The cockpit looks like a catalog of interior options for a Volvo, complete with Recaro racing seat.

around 4500 which only a prolonged bootful, preferably uphill, would clear out. The freeways were no help as you were only doing around 3000 in top or less than that in o.d. at the legal limit. Due to the light loading, running in the lower gears didn't scavenge enough to help much either with the result that you kept getting into vibration periods at various rpm ranges (especially 3000 which is a resonant period on that engine anyway) and have to fiddle around to find a happier one. After gassing up at a familiar station we got further out back and flung it around some in the gears, causing it to get distinctly unhappy as if the plugs were really sooted up. After due reflection and a conversation with R&T's Engineering Editor, John Dinkel, it came clear that the trouble at the top end anyway was because of lousy gasoline. Southern California gasoline is very nearly the worst in the country anyway as they can sell so much of it willy nilly, especially after the mocked-up "shortage" to put the prices up. Many companies now are selling diluted ethyl for premium and in some cases what used to be regular for premium; what they sell for regular I shouldn't visit on a 2 CV Citroën. Apparently the oil companies have got the govt by the neck and nobody is checking this stuff out. Anyway Dinkel borrowed the Volvo back and put some Texaco in which improved the preignition end of things.

In our further and ceaseless search for knowledge I took the Volvo over a nice mountain pass near here and can report that it is a jolly Grand Turismo car, barring road noise being telegraphed if the surface is a bit rough. The engine is said to put out about 186 DIN at 6250 rpm; well I didn't go up too close to that redline with thoughts of preignition in my ears and Volvo rockers like yr average pork chop as who wants to scatter a Stage 4? Needless to say that it has an electrifying performance with all sorts of vintage healthy sucking noises from up front although the noise level never gets obtrusive under these conditions. Brakes are very good, body lean low, directional stability excellent, steering heaviesh at low speeds but very light and accurate under way, cornering very good with no hopping about and a trace of understeer which is a lot safer than Porscheitis. Most of the way we went up alternating between top and o.d. which worked out well as there are bags of torque; the car feels much lighter than it actually is. Passing other cars on this twisty road was no problem; usually a flick down to proper top was sufficient (with not even full throttle) or occasionally third for very short straights. A pleasant surprise was coming down the other side of the pass as the plugs didn't load up. Road mileage averaged around 11 mpg.

We got a good-behavior present the next day and pattered

off to Riverside Raceway for a few laps around the track. John Dinkel, Joe Ruzs (who shot a million photos) and Volvo Competition Service Manager Wayne Baldwin were also on hand to have a nice day in the outback. We all flogged the wagon around with various degrees of success, me probably being the slowest as I have always been diffident about blowing up other people's cars. This was my first drive actually on Riverside and it was very interesting to "do" it after having watched so many races. Actually I went faster than I thought as the corners are mostly open and even slightly banked. After a couple of laps at the same (slow) time, I started getting more enterprising and found that we could get more rpm down the front straight (abt 110+ mph indicated) than the back by virtue of a better shot out of the banked Turn 9. Except for the straights, normal top or even third (for the sharper ones) seemed to give more grip but it would have taken about 20 more laps to make sure. Handling at my racing speed anyway was about the same as on the canyon road; the car never jiggled about in an unsafe manner and could be placed exactly to the apex of a corner, even with hamhandedly going oohh aaah at the wrong place on a strange track. The ride was extremely comfortable as on the road, a great help as nobody likes to get slung about. I had a lot of fun and games trying to connect two right angle turns separated by a slippery and short straight into one long glorious slide. A touch on the brake coming in would get the tail out and then the project was to keep it out until safely around the next corner. What really impressed me was the degree of monkeying around you could do and not mingle with the Armco as the front end was still gripping very well. I was trying to get some photogenic attitudes for Ruzs and getting pretty untidy, wagging the front wheels back and forth to look fast, but never got out of shape. Which proves I wasn't going fast, of course!

Everything ran very well as Gunnar had done his homework. Water temp stayed absolutely normal, oil temp got rather near to 100 C as it needed a quart (yes, there was an oil rad), the overdrive got a bit noisy and we gather that it was a little low as well. Frankly I don't see why Volvo doesn't build all their cars like that with milder engines of course; Granny wouldn't object to the suspension (it rides better than mine) but she might not care for the gargle spit routine. I must say that it is as nice as a daughter's kiss to drive a car with something alive under the hood instead of these poor asthmatic strangled things. True safety starts with a willing engine and suspension instead of a book of restrictions as thick as a dictionary.

Tak för mat, fellas.

