New from Sweden
VOLVO'S 240 & 260 SERIES

The practical safety car becomes a sophisticated luxury car

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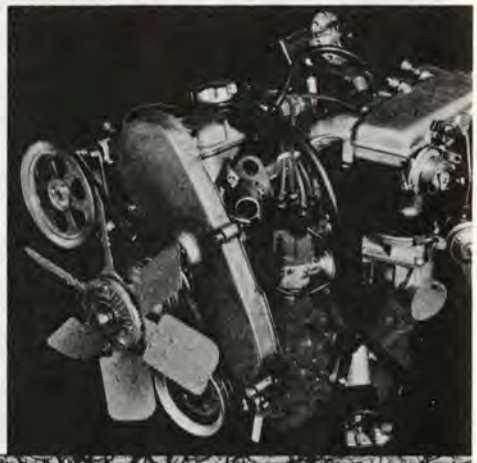
Editor

New Volvo 4-cylinder has aluminum head.



NEW FROM VOLVO for 1976 are the luxury 264 model and the 265 station wagon—which has the distinction of being the most expensive production station wagon in the world—and two new engines. To introduce these cars and engines, a small group of journalists was invited by Volvo to visit Sweden where we had the opportunity to drive the cars under the conditions for which they were designed.

Before describing these new cars and engines, it might be opportune first to review how Volvo's system of number designation works so that we all know what we are talking about. Taking a 245 as an example, the 2 means that the car is one of the 240 series cars, which were introduced last year and supersedes the 140 series that have been sold since 1966. The 4 means that it has four cylinders and the 5 means that it is a 5-door station wagon. The 260 series works in the same way except, of course, that the cars have six cylinders.

Taking the two engines first, these are an aluminum V-6 to replace the old iron inline-6 of the 160 series and an overhead-cam four to replace the pushrod engine in the 240 cars.

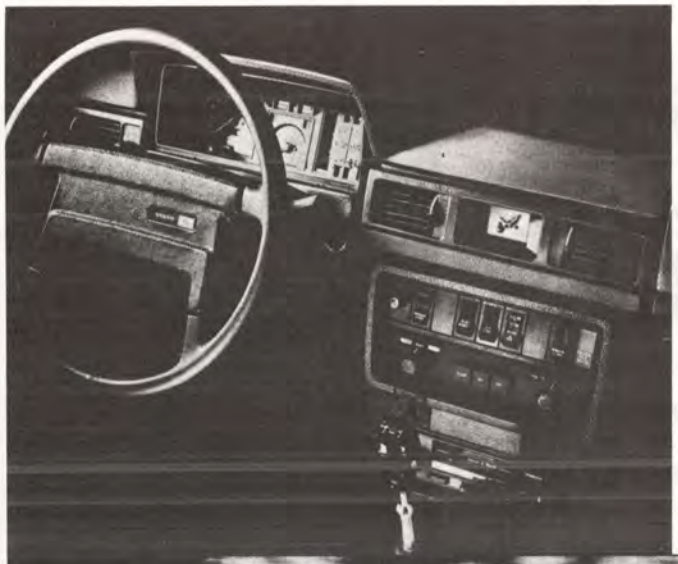
The V-6 engine, designated the B-27, was developed by Volvo, Peugeot and Renault for mutual use and we described it in our story on the Peugeot 604 last October. It has a single overhead camshaft for each bank of cylinders with the camshafts driven by chains, and the characteristic roughness of the 90-degree V-6, which is caused by irregular induction strokes, is partially smoothed out by a difference in valve timing for each bank of cylinders. This aluminum engine is fuel injected using the Bosch K-Jetronic system, and the power output is 125 bhp SAE net at 5500 rpm and 121 bhp at 5500 rpm for California cars.

The new 4-cylinder engine is designated the B-21 and it replaces the earlier B-20. Readers may recall that the B-20 was a cast iron, pushrod engine of extremely sturdy construction and that it had been getting a bit long in the tooth for several years. The B-21 retains the rugged bottom-end characteristics of its predecessor, but the cylinder head is now aluminum and of the crossflow type, valve actuation is by a belt-driven overhead camshaft and Bosch continuous flow fuel injection is used. Engine capacity has been increased from 1990 cc to 2127 cc and the power output has gone from 94 bhp at 6000 rpm to 102 bhp at 5200 rpm (99 bhp at 5200 rpm for California). But more important, the torque figure is now 114 lb-ft at 2500 rpm compared to the previous 105 lb-ft at 3500 rpm.

Improving the low-speed torque was a major objective in the design of this engine, and it is most noticeable when one drives the car. We tested a 242 with the old engine last July and found it to be woefully underpowered, but I am pleased to say that this fault has now been corrected, although I wasn't able to obtain any performance figures while I was in Sweden.

As far as transmissions are concerned, the 242 and 244 come with an automatic or a 4-speed manual with an optional overdrive. In the case of the 245, 264 and 265 models the same two transmissions are offered for the three cars, but the overdrive is standard with the 4-speed transmission.

Volvo has been in the U.S. market for 20 years, and the company's image has changed considerably since the early days when the cars were sold on the slogan "drive it like you hate it." Unfortunately, so has the price. Today the Volvo range encompasses 11 models ranging from the 242 at $6295 through the 265 at $9495. On the other hand, the cars are much more



to drive them at Volvo's proving grounds and also on a 200-mile trip over everything from dirt roads to freeways. Flogging the hell out of what amounts to a $10,000 station wagon down a dirt road in the rain seemed to be somewhat sacrilegious, but that's what they wanted us to do, and so that's what we did.

Basically one can say that the cars have a heavy and safe feel to them. They are most luxurious and comfortable and give a sense of security that results partly from a high seating position. The styling results from Volvo's experiments with safety vehicles and might be described as "Swedish solid."

On the road the cars are a great improvement over the 140 and 160 series mainly because of the use of MacPherson-strut front suspension and rack-and-pinion steering along with sundry detail modifications. The handling is strictly neutral although understeer predominates when one starts to reach the limit. I was able to drive a 244 with conventional steering and

luxurious and when one gets to the top of the line, such items as power steering, air conditioning, tinted glass and power front windows are standard. "Going up market," as it is called in today's terminology, seems to be the only way for smaller manufacturers to survive under today's economic conditions. Volvo seems to be surviving well but, in order to get back to mass market prices, Volvo recently acquired the Dutch Daf company, which makes the minicar with the rubber-band transmission. Actually, it is a very clever little car, and the only car I have found that you could drive around Silverstone without ever lifting your foot at all, although you could come close to door-handling it in one or two places.

There is a very good chance that a Volvo/Daf version of this car will be offered in the U.S. in about a year, and meanwhile it provides Volvo with an opportunity for coming into the bottom of the Scandinavian and European markets with a really low-price car. Actually, there is more to the Daf acquisition than that because, according to Volvo Vice President Åke Nilsson, Daf is currently producing about 60,000 cars a year and has a capacity for 200,000. It is also in the heavy truck business and so is Volvo, and Volvo acquired about 200 experienced automobile and truck engineers in the deal.

As far as the current models are concerned, we were able a 264 with power steering on a twisting section of the test track wetted down by sprinklers (why the sprinklers I don't know because it poured with rain practically the whole time we were in Sweden). The adhesion was excellent and the handling neutral, but the 244 was definitely faster and gave a greater feeling of security than the 264.

On our 200-mile drive across southern Sweden, the reason why Volvos are designed and built as they are became apparent. Sweden is a vast country but very thinly populated, and the winters are long and severe. As a result, it is virtually impossible to maintain very high standards of road surface on anything more than the main highways, so that extremely rugged construction is essential for longevity. For these reasons, a Volvo would be an excellent choice for those people who live in more remote parts of the country with climatic conditions similar to those in Sweden.

Volvo has come a long way in the last 20 years and the 240 and 260 series cars are infinitely more sophisticated than they were even five years ago. However, sophistication has its price and in the case of these new Volvos the price is somewhere between $6500 and $10,000. If this is too much for you, perhaps you should wait until a Daf comes along with a Volvo badge on it.