



# THE VOLVO EVOLUTION

*Detail changes and suspension improvements for 1979*



**V**OLVO AB OF Gothenburg, Sweden, is a solidly conservative automobile manufacturing firm that is not given to radical changes, flights of fancy or gimmicky styling embellishments. Volvo cars are a direct reflection of the company's operating philosophy—based on safety for the occupants, comfort, reasonable performance and moderately good handling characteristics that are predictable so the driver won't be in over his head in dealing with an emergency on the road. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the changes for the 1979 models from Volvo are limited. Their belief is that the cars are quite good and it's only necessary to make minor (albeit important) alterations. Along with seven other automotive journalists, I recently traveled to Sweden to drive the 1979 Volvo cars and found the following changes noteworthy:

The rear end has been redesigned with a lower body panel and new deck lid to make a larger trunk opening so that putting baggage away requires less of a lift over the sill. Also, the taillight assembly is new and is a 1-piece molded housing and lens with printed circuitry and a single electrical cable hookup. These changes apply to the Series 240 (242DL 2-door, 244DL 4-door, 245DL station wagon and 242GT) and 260 (262C coupe, 264 4-door and 265 station wagon). The new taillight assembly is cleanly styled and gives the Volvo rear

end a more up-to-date look in my opinion, with just a hint of Mercedes-Benz influence.

Both the 245 and 265 station wagon models now have dual gas-filled support struts for the tailgate, which makes closing the hatch a one-hand operation. There are also minor changes to such things as body side moldings, the finish on the bumpers, windshield tinting, etc.

The most important changes for the new model year, however, come in the area of suspension, where Volvo engineers have made adjustments to improve stability and roadholding. All the 240 and 260 sedans (except the 242GT) have larger front and rear anti-roll bars; going from 18.0 to 19.5 mm in the front, while the rear bars have grown from 16.0 to 19.0 mm. The 245 station wagon's front a-r bar has also grown to 19.5 mm and a rear bar (16.0 mm) has been added for the first time. The 242GT is now equipped with a 21.0-mm front bar and 23.0-mm rear one, versus the 21/18 combination of last year. The result is increased roll stiffness in all the models, but most drivers will be hard pressed to notice it without making a specific handling comparison. Nevertheless, it's a good move and does improve an area where we have been critical of Volvo in the past.

All of the cars in the Volvo line for the U.S. market have up-rated shock absorbers to take some of the softness and

flotation out of the ride characteristics, especially over undulating pavement and uneven surfaces. This too is a laudatory move. The 265 station wagon for 1979 has fully automatic, self-leveling shock absorbers at the rear end, so that piling the cargo in the back won't sag the rear and drive the nose up.

There have been modifications to the steering too, including a change in caster angle at the front wheels (it's now 3.5 degrees versus 2.5 previously) to bring about more self-centering action, according to Volvo, and the servo system on the power-assisted steering has been altered to reduce assistance and raise effort. The result is that the driver now has more feedback and, one hopes, better control.

Inside the 1979 cars from Gothenburg, improvements have been made to the fresh-air ventilation system to provide greater airflow, and the optional air conditioning is also upgraded: In the 240 Series cars there is a larger capacity compressor, while the 260 models have a new condenser and thermostat for improved temperature control. New materials and expanded color selections mark the upholstery of Volvos for 1979.

As you can see, none of these changes to the new models is earth shaking, but taken as a comprehensive package of alterations, there is evidence of a determination to provide improved automobiles while retaining those virtues established by Volvo over the years—cars that are comfortable and have a preeminent emphasis on safety.