

VOLVO NEWS

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

STATEMENT NO. 3

"THE VOLVO WAY" - THE STORY OF VOLVO PRODUCTS
IN AUSTRALIA - 1970 TO 1980.

At the turn of the decade, when Volvo Australia was being conceived by mother Volvo in Sweden, a prospective Volvo car owner would have been faced with an interesting dilemma - four distinctly different Volvos from which to choose. There was the last of the legendary 122s, the first of the 144s, Volvo's new '6', the 164 and the latest version of the P1800. Down the road, the buyer of a Volvo truck didn't have quite the same problem. There was the 210 bhp F86 and the 270hp 88, and a few different axle options if you were prepared to wait. If you wanted a Volvo BM front end loader there were two models in stock. Anything else, there was a nine months delay.

Times have changed since then. The total number of models for all Volvo products combined available in Australia is around 50. And because of the fact that Australia is ranked by Volvo as one of its top ten markets, the stock pipeline is much shorter, with local assembly of cars, trucks and buses giving added flexibility.

But back to the turn of the decade: Both Volvo's of the time were powered by the same 2 litre B20 engine developing 118hp. The 122 had a stylish but somewhat dated body. The 144 had a functional design - but one which was quickly to be labelled 'a box on a box'.

The prized 122 had its roots dating back to 1956 and the last of the PV544's. Both cars starred in rally successes; the PV544 in Europe in the fifties and sixties, the 122 in Australia in the sixties. Even in those days, the 122 had a laminated wind-screen, collapsible steering column and seat belts as standard - a world first. The 122 incorporated the famous Volvo safety seat with the adjustable lumbar support.

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Today the 122 is rapidly becoming a collectors piece, with resale values holding up and lucky owners lovingly caring for their cars. Many have mileages heading for 200,000 miles. Until he sold his in 1975, former "Truck and Bus" Editor, Jack Maddock's racing green 122 had notched up 120,000 miles. In typical meticulous 122 owner fashion, Jack's log-book contained a wealth of detail. The new owner is a lucky man.

But the prize at any Volvo Concourse d'elegance must go to Max Stahl's fire-engine red 1966 122. Max, Editor of Racing Car News had done more than 160,000 miles in the 13 years he has owned the car.

Introduced in Australia in 1977, the 122's successor-to-be, the 144 certainly offered potential owners a more modern car. And whilst the 122 enthusiasts shed a tear, the 144 certainly attracted a much wider following. The car came in manual, manual with overdrive, automatic, two-door, four door and station wagon.

The early 144s were still relatively austere with rubber mats and metal dash panel. The colours were about as bright as a Gothenburg morning in December. But this was no obstacle to sales because the market was buying for safety's sake. Safe the new Volvos certainly were: Triangular dual-circuit braking system, energy absorbing front and rear ends, roll bar in the roof and passenger safety cage were just a few of the innovations.

A look into a Modern Motor road test in May 1969 reveals that despite Volvo's pre-occupation with crash safety, the magazine regarded the new 144 as a drivers car: "A good turn of speed, a beautiful four-speed manual gearbox, one of the most adequately braked cars we have ever driven. The car handled well on gravel roads, it behaved very predictably."

Fuel consumption for the Modern Motor test was 26.3 mpg over 316 miles. It does today's Volvos credit to note that despite the extra weight plus the effect of emission controls, most testers are getting around 25 mpg from a 244 manual.

One car which is credited with putting Volvo on the world map more than any other was the P1800. Introduced in Europe in 1961, it was the brain child of Volvo designer Jan Wilsgaard. Roger Moore made the 1800 justly famous in his 'Saint' TV series. Because of the economics of low volume, however, the 1800 was to retire after 1973. But not without a flourish. In 1972, Volvo introduced the 1800ES, with slant-back and loads of luggage space. To call every 1800 a classic is an understatement. Today such a car is a treasured possession.

In 1979 Volvo introduced the first 6-cylinder car since 1946, when the PV60 was launched. This new car was called the 164. The body was a long nosed version of the new 144, with engineering features and luxury appointments giving the 164 quite a different image to its spartan brother. The engine was a new in-line six. Upholstery was leather. Automatic transmission was the norm.

Whilst all cars in 1970 were fully imported, Volvo trucks had been assembled since the mid sixties from P.K.D. (partly knocked down) kits at Swedish Motors Workshop in Wollongong. The choice of variants in those days was limited. Operators could take it or leave it. Almost like Henry Ford's maxim "any colour you want as long as it's black."

Nevertheless, the market did not hesitate. Owner operators in particular were ready for a quality European truck. Barry Hatfield, former assistant Editor of "Truck & Bus" and now consultant to the road transport industry recalls his impressions of the first Volvo truck.

"The 86 was the first truck in Europe with an eight speed fully synchronised range type gearbox. This created a tremendous impact amongst Australian operators.

"Even at that time, Volvo designers were already thinking of the drivers environment and its effect on overall economy."

"When I first evaluated the F86 in October 1976, I was impressed with the low set cab. The quality of fittings and controls was our first taste of the Swedish approach. We had been familiar with Volvo cars, now we were seeing the same approach in trucks.

"The 86 had a low tare weight of 15 cwt. From an engineering point of view, the gearbox and differential was the heaviest I had seen in a truck for long haul work."

The other truck of the early 70s was the F88 - later to be called the G88 - to denote a shorter front bumper bar to front axle measurement - a modification designed to achieve a better axle loading. The G88 developed 270hp, had a 16 speed splitter gearbox and a weight-adjustable driver's seat. Like the F86, it had a turbo-charged in-line 6 cylinder diesel engine, a power concept conceived by Volvo's 'grand old man' of engineering, Bertil Haagh, and pioneered by Volvo in the fifties. Turbo-charging gave several benefits:

- * more horsepower from a small capacity engine,
- * lower engine weight,
- * better fuel economy,
- * lower exhaust emissions
- and
- * lower noise levels externally and in the cab.

Bertil Haagh (he visited Australia in June for the Fuel Economy Symposium) was obviously a man who was years ahead of his time!

Both the '86 and '88 were sufficiently advanced that no major model change occurred for almost 20 years. Since 1978 we have seen the introduction of the 230 hp F7, the 300 hp F10 and the 350 hp F12. Volvo's bonnetted versions, the N10 and N12 have been around for a little longer, but are of a similar specification.

The new F10 & F12 boast an equipment level comparable with luxury cars; (This should not be surprising. Prices start around \$60,000). There's integrated air-conditioning - AM/FM stereo deck and radio, sprung adjustable seats, with velour upholstery, full instrumentation, safety-cab, and sound insulation as good as in any motor car.

Back in 1970, the range of truck variants was very limited. This changed dramatically from 1972 when Volvo established a Truck and Bus assembly plant in Queensland. With the plant came a product design & development department. With this facility, Volvo was able to enlarge its range and at the same time adapt all its trucks to suit Australian conditions. Today there are 14 basic models offering in total a choice of approximately 80 variants.

The range of Volvo BM machines in Australia in 1970 was as limited as the Volvo trucks. The main model was the 840. Consistent with Volvo's philosophy of looking after the driver the cab was designed for safety and comfort.

And whilst it may have been easy on the operator - it certainly was not easy on the eye. It was angular, boxy, looking like some giant yellow insect. But this mattered little to the contractors or councils who put them into service. From a town in central Sweden these BM people (did it stand for bloody marvellous?) had designed a machine which was a trend setter for its time. Its big feature was the quick release coupling which enabled the operator to change attachments almost as quickly as you could say "optimum utilization". The Volvo BM loaders were in demand right from the start.

The Volvo BM people also produced a marvellous machine called a forest forwarder which disappeared into the forest and came back in minutes flat with 30 or so logs on its back. This machine, to the Australian man-in-the street, was as conspicuous as the Abominable Snowman. Yet there are 80 of these highly productive beasts, prowling through the country's forests in the service of the softwood industry.

Ten years on, Volvo BMs main line, the loaders, have a new-look range and a new-look organization. The organization, headed by Divisional Manager, Jeff Johnson, is based on three main company-owned retail facilities in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, so that Volvo can deal direct with the user, not only in regard to sales but also in the all important areas of service and parts.

The loaders are virtually all 'new generation'. The newest is the 4500 bringing to seven the number of loaders in the Volvo range. The 4500 has a safety cab, air conditioning, non-glare mat black arms, articulated steering and what Johnson describes as the most modern lifting unit in the industry.

A machine, which should not be overlooked is the DR 861 dumper, an articulated off-road unit used mainly in the movement of materials on or off sites when conditions are so bad even 4 wheel trucks would bog down.

During those years when the truck and earthmoving people at Volvo in Gothenburg were busy innovating, there was a feeling growing at the Car Division, that the Volvo car of the mid seventies, whilst long on crash safety, was short on handling and performance. In fact, feedback from market research, importers, customers and the media all confirmed this view.

After a series of faltering starts, Volvo's experts on vehicle dynamics and engineering "fine tuned" their Swedish machine until today, the average Volvo's handling and performance is anything but average. Bigger engines on some models, overdrive, bigger sway bars, revised shock absorber settings, spring strut suspension, new low profile tyres and rack and pinion steering with revised geometry all add up to what the Swedes term "Dynamic Safety", a piece of Madison Avenue "hype" which in fact, covers a multitude of virtues. Pressed to explain Dynamic Safety, a Volvos engineer will explain thus in his somewhat ponderous English: "It is those characteristics in a Volvo which make the car as predictable in a panic situation as it is in normal driving". Almost as an afterthought he will add with a smile, "Dynamic Safety also makes driving a Volvo much more of a pleasure!" An interesting paradox.

Over the last ten years, Volvo's 6 cylinder car has steadily been refined and equipped to the point where, today, according to Roy Firth, Car Division Manager, it is the equal in luxury of any car up to \$40,000. Appointments in today's 264GLE include electric windows, central locking, dictating equipment, velour or leather upholstery and rear sun blinds.

No one at Volvo Australia will deny that one or two of the products they have been asked to sell during the seventies have fallen short of expectations. But on balance, the consensus is that the company has always marketed products which try to live up to an ideal, an ideal, which puts function first and fashion second, an ideal which started fifty-three years ago in Gothenburg - an ideal called "the Volvo Way".

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