



on the road with a

Volvo 132S



WHILE the American, and American-controlled car manufacturers push ahead with their policy of changing models as frequently as possible, there is still a strong feeling in Europe that designs should be conserved and improved over as long a period as possible; economics, of course, play a large part. Volvo, the Swedish factory unusual in having one basic engine of 1780 cc to power the whole range, adhere strongly to the theme of improvement rather than innovation and while it may please some people to call their cars old-fashioned, they are at least pleasantly so. In the 132S two-door saloon we tested there is a combination of strength, performance and ruggedness ideally suited to a reasonably conservative market comprising people who want lively performance from a durable product.

Coming from a land of bad roads and hard winters (and by all accounts hard drivers), one can assume that the Volvo has strong suspension, a powerful heater, will remain free from corrosion, and prove generally trouble-free—this all seems to be true. It is also the biggest car to have performed consistently well in international rallies in recent years and this does not surprise us. Slow off the mark with high overall gearing, the 132S has a tremendous range in intermediate gears and covers the ground surprisingly quickly without feeling

the least bit strained. To sort out any confusion, the 132S is the 122 series, type 132, which explains the 122S badge on the side!

Performance and handling

Powering the 132S Volvo is a 95 bhp (gross) version of the four-cylinder engine, equipped in this case with two 1½-in SU carburettors. The unit has an iron block and head, overhead camshaft, and the crankshaft runs in five bearings; it is not the most powerful version, that fitted to the P1800 Coupé developing 115 bhp gross, but a net ratio of 50 bhp/ton is still very adequate. The saloon has heavy, high-waisted lines and although not light, tipping 20.8cwt at the kerb, it is quite efficient aerodynamically.

With just a little choke the engine starts easily and warms up quickly. Lightweight paper filters on the carburettors do little to silence the induction noise which takes on a rather harsh and well-tuned note under power, somewhat out of keeping with a medium-stressed five-bearing engine.

A 4.1 axle ratio gives 17.6 mph/1000 rpm in top gear, but an extremely high first ratio, which takes the car up to 35 mph, allows the gears to be closely spaced. It is almost essential to start in bottom, and the all-synchromesh gearbox is so nice that we found ourselves reaching for first before

any tight corner in town or in the country. Second takes the Volvo to 55 mph, third to 80 mph, and top speed is 95 mph though 100 is frequently seen in favourable conditions. As the engine will run happily to 6400 rpm, the car feels as though it will go on all day at top speed with a thousand revs in hand.

Although the performance figures through the gears are very good, the driver has to work the car hard to achieve them. The revs die for a few moments if a brisk start is attempted, unless the clutch is ridden, and such is the range in the gears that it is more natural to change up earlier and use the torque to its best advantage. It was noticeable on the test car, which may have had a hard life, that the clutch did not take kindly to hard upward gear-changes. The gearshift itself is smooth and positive, though with a long travel due to the lever being mounted well forward on the tunnel. The 132S is clearly not so much a sports saloon as a brisk touring car, with such weight and high gearing that inertia seems to keep it going rapidly without much effort.

The suspension may be very strong, suited to bad roads, but it is not ideal in this country. It is firm at town speeds and develops a long, floating motion on undulating surfaces when the car is driven fast suggesting soft springs and firm damp-

ing, an idea which is reinforced by its cornering characteristics. Marked under-steer at low speed gives way to progressive roll, more noticeable at the back until it actually induces oversteer. However the whole process is very gradual and on wet roads the handling is entirely predictable and vice-free, with plenty of early warning when simple corrective action is required.

Worm and roller steering is fitted, again high-g geared with 3½ turns from lock to lock and not altogether free from kick-back on bumpy roads. But is it very quick and precise, contributing to the pleasure of driving the Volvo. For preference, a smaller wheel positioned a little further from the driver would be more pleasant for long-distance driving.

Big disc brakes at the front, 10.8 in diameter, and drums at the rear provide a superb, well-balanced braking system, well complemented on wet roads by the Goodyear G8 tyres. Pedal pressure is fairly high and it is rather surprising that a servo system is not optional, with women drivers in mind, but when accustomed to the system a driver could trust it implicitly from any speed, on any type of surface. The lights, too, are extremely good for high-speed travel, with a more penetrating dipped beam than most systems offer.

Comfort and equipment

You wouldn't really call the 132S a luxurious car, but comfort abounds as a product of careful planning. Carpeting is eschewed in favour of rubber matting throughout, so much more hard-wearing and practical in winter, and there is more paintwork around the fascia than one normally sees in an £1100 car. On the other hand the seats are amazingly comfortable, the heater is overpowering if given the chance, seatbelts are a standard fitting, and one can generally live in this car for hours, over long distances, without suffering.

Rather than use a mass of padding which contours itself, Volvo's seats have very pronounced (and adjustable) curvature in the lumbar region and extra padding to support the thighs, just above the knee. Without wishing to oust the anatomical experts of Harley Street, we suggest that the seats are ideal for anyone suffering from back trouble, especially since they have reclining backrests and a good range of height and reach adjustment to keep most customers happy.

The 132 is a two-door saloon, but access to the back is quite reasonable and once installed, there is plenty of legroom and headroom for a couple of adults, who also have the comfort of a central armrest. The rear windows are flexibly hinged at the leading edge, and propping them open is the easiest and quickest way of ventilating the car at high speed. Generally the wind noise is very low, though an annoying whistle was traced to the heater intake and disappeared if the inlet vent was opened slightly.

Individual controls on the fascia distribute air to the front, rear and the screen, with volume and temperature adjustment. The heater churns out warmed air very shortly after a cold start, and the blower is quite unnecessary when the car is moving.

We have enthused before about the seatbelts, which clip direct to a ring on the tunnel in a one-handed action. The hand-brake is situated on the floor at the right

of the driving seat, well within reach but ideally situated to rap an unwary ankle as the driver gets out of the car. The pedals are unusually large and well spaced, a feature which is appreciated by drivers more used to cramped surroundings. Still the accelerator is conveniently placed for heel-and-toe gearchanges.

Instruments are contained in a binnacle directly ahead of the driver—a ribbon speedometer (rather optimistic) is flanked by a temperature gauge and a fuel gauge, with the usual warning light for oil pressure, dynamo charge, indicators, etc. Two-speed wipers are controlled by a pull-out knob, which on the third notch operates the washers as well. Although the knobs are labelled, it would be easier for a driver new to the car if the lighting switch was on the outer end of the row, instead of second to the wipers. A cigarette lighter is provided, and a trip mileometer is also installed. Indicators, and the headlamp flasher, are worked by a lever from the left of the steering column.

Boot space is pretty adequate for normal purposes though at holiday time the upright spare wheel might be a nuisance. The rear-hinged bonnet has an automatic stay, and engine accessibility is first class.

There are no grease points to worry about on the Volvo, and apart from changing engine oil and checking round at 3000 mile intervals the main service period is 6000 miles. This is the sort of car which builds up terrific customer-loyalty, irrespective of new models which come and go from rival factories, basing a reputation primarily upon reliability and good workmanship.

M.L.C.

SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Four cylinders in line; bore 84.14 mm, stroke 80 mm, cubic capacity 1780 cc. Compression ratio 8.7:1. Maximum bhp (net) 86 at 5000 rpm, maximum torque (net) 107 lb ft at 3500 rpm. Overhead valves, pushrod operated. Two SU HS6 carburettors. AC mechanical fuel pump, tank capacity 10 gallons. Water cooling with pump, fan and thermostat, capacity 14 pints. Sump capacity 7 pints. 12V 60 amp/hr battery.

TRANSMISSION

Four-speed, synchromesh on all ratios, floor change. Gearbox ratios: 1st—3.25; 2nd—3.13; 3rd—1.99; 4th—1. Final drive via hypoid live axle, ratio 4.1; gearing 17.6 mph/1000 rpm in top.

CHASSIS

Integral steel two-door saloon body. Suspension, front— independent by coil springs and wishbones; rear—live axle located by double trailing arms, Panhard rod, coil springs. Brakes: front, 10.8 dia discs; rear, 9 in drums. Steering by Gemmer cam and roller. Pressed steel disc wheels, 4J-15, tyres Goodyear G8 165-15.

DIMENSIONS

	ft	ins
Wheelbase	8	6.5
Track, front	4	4
Track, rear	4	4.75
Overall length	14	6.25
Overall width	5	4.25
Overall height	4	10
Ground clearance		7.25
Turning circle	31	2
Kerb weight	20.8	cwt.

PERFORMANCE

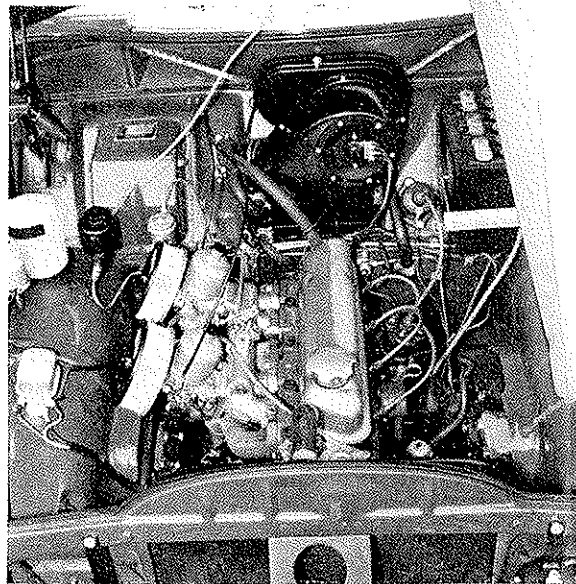
mph	secs
0 - 30	4.0
0 - 40	6.6
0 - 50	9.8
0 - 60	14.0
0 - 70	19.8

SPEEDS IN GEARS

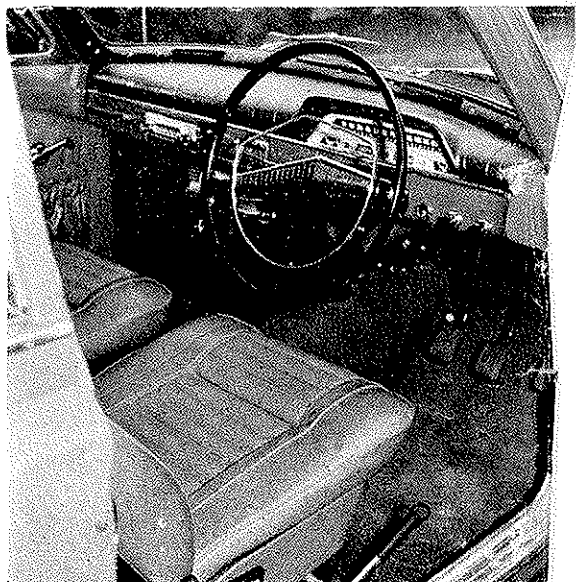
	mph
1st	35
2nd	56
3rd	81
4th	95

Overall fuel consumption: 23.6 mpg

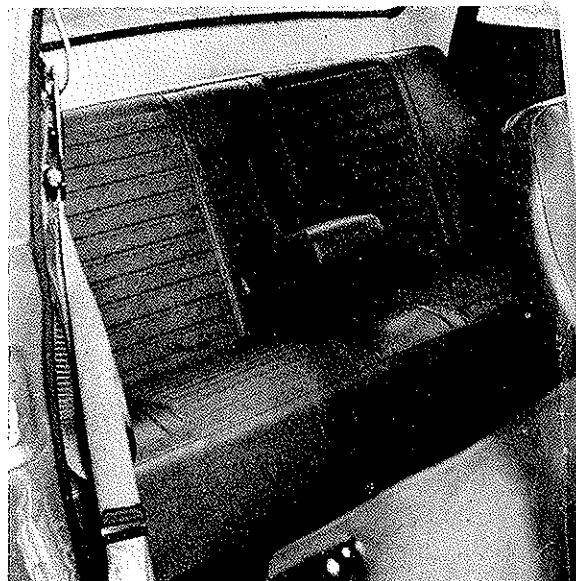
Price as tested: £1120.



ENGINE is a 95 bhp version of Volvo's famous four-cylinder engine, which seemed very adequate for the job.



HOT SEAT. The seats are, in fact, extremely comfortable and many British manufacturers could take note of this!



THERE IS plenty of room in the back for two adults, and access to the rear is quite reasonable.