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Design - the Volvo Safety Concept Car

The Volvo Safety Concept Car is one of four concept cars presented by the Volvo Car Corporation since the Paris Motor Show in the autumn of 2000.

"Concept cars are an excellent way of providing a glimpse of the future without being constrained by a specific design. They help us to make wise decisions in our development work," says Peter Horbury, chief designer at Volvo Cars.

Volvo Cars has been aware that a technically innovative car requires an equally innovative design since the Volvo Environmental Concept Car was presented at the beginning of the 1990s.

This hybrid car received tremendous media coverage – largely thanks to its bold language of design. A design which then went on to inspire the Volvo S80.

"By tradition, Volvo was an engineering-driven company. In the past, concept cars were primarily regarded as a way of presenting new technology. However, as the automotive world and the media that cover it are visually focused, a concept car also needs an innovative design if it is to attract the right attention," Peter Horbury adds.

Safety can be sexy and compact

The Volvo Safety Concept Car, which was given its first showing at the Detroit Motor Show in 2001, is the perfect illustration of this philosophy.

"We probably shocked some experts who simply took it for granted that a safety car from Volvo would have to be a large family car. With the Volvo SCC, we are demonstrating that we can also package safety in a sexy, exciting and compact manner," Peter Horbury explains.

"I personally found it just as exciting to obtain an answer to the question of whether people still remembered the special rear design that had been taken from the model from the early 1970s, the P1800 ES. The answer was a resounding 'yes' – even from people who were not even born when the car was introduced in 1971. Fun and slightly surprising," he adds.

The Volvo Safety Concept Car also represents a new way of regarding the balance between designers and engineers at Volvo Cars. Several of the new technical features actually originate from the design department.

"In the past, it was usually the designer's job to find an attractive way of packaging the engineer's ideas. Nowadays, it can just as easily be the other way round. The designer comes up with a concept and the engineer makes it work technically. This is a partnership that is both better and more enjoyable for both of them – as well as being more successful and profitable for the company," says Peter Horbury.

Four design proposals blended into one

The Volvo SCC grew from ideas developed at the Volvo Monitoring and Concept Center (VMCC) in

Camarillo, California. The original idea was to improve active safety by giving every driver exactly the same view from behind the wheel, via the so-called fixed eye point. On top of this, Peter Horbury saw a much wider design opportunity.

"The Volvo SCC is first and foremost a safety concept to re-establish Volvo's safety credentials," says Horbury. "In the past, this safety image tended to be associated with boring, stodgy, slow cars, as if safety by definition was less interesting. You added safety by adding mass, but that's not going to get you far today, when fuel consumption is highly important.

"With the SCC, we clearly demonstrate that safety itself can be exciting and cool. Something you show your neighbours and can be proud of. In the past, Volvo customers had to take our word on safety, the features remain totally hidden until they are needed in an accident. In the SCC, you see the safety aspects every time you use the car. The see-through A-pillars are an excellent example of this," says Peter Horbury.

Four VMCC designers contributed to the look of the SCC. Using computer technology, elements from each of their proposals were blended to produce the final shape. Stefan Jansson was responsible for the final design. He describes his work in the next chapter of this documentation.

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