

Press Release

Jun 07, 2016 | ID: 191851

The model that aimed for the stars: the Volvo 850 celebrates its 25th birthday

The Volvo 850 was the car that changed everything – a front-wheel-drive Volvo with a five-cylinder transverse engine. It was the result of the Galaxy project, which got its name because it was aiming for the stars. The 850 series achieved great success in the field of motorsport, and was the first car from Volvo available with AWD.

The brand-new Volvo 850 GLT had its world premiere in the Stockholm Globe Arena on June 11 in 1991. The model was the result of one of Sweden's largest industrial investments and differed fundamentally from previous Volvo designs. It had front-wheel drive, a five-cylinder transverse engine and offered a whole new level of driving pleasure.



The new car was launched under the banner "A dynamic car with four world firsts". These new features were the transverse five-cylinder engine, the Delta-link rear axle designed in-house, the integrated side-impact protection system, SIPS, and the self-adjusting front seat belt.

Even though the design was reminiscent of the 700 series, the 850 was a completely new car. The work on developing the model began back in 1978. At a meeting held that year, it was decided that it was now time to think freely and aim for the stars. That's why the project was christened Galaxy.

Project Galaxy resulted in two model series – one Swedish and one Dutch. The underlying technology was developed jointly; after this the teams split up. The Dutch company Volvo Car B.V went on to develop what would become the 400 series, while Volvo Cars in Sweden developed the 850 series.

The first model to be presented was the 850 GLT, with its 20-valve naturally aspirated engine producing 170 hp. During the development phase, Volvo worked actively to make the 850 GLT a lively car that delivered great driving pleasure while achieving the correct intake and exhaust noise.

The next important 850 version was presented in February 1993 – the estate car. It boasted typical Volvo features such as the abruptly ending rear section for maximum load capacity. One new design feature, however, was the extended vertical tail lights that covered the entire D-post. During the development work, Chief Designer Jan Wilsgaard had a model on which the large tail lights could be removed and replaced for comparison. The estate version was subsequently awarded the prestigious Japanese distinction “1994 Good Design Grand Prize” as well as the Italian “Most beautiful estate”.

The 850 series was soon expanded with various engine options. The model that would achieve most attention was presented at the Geneva Motor Show in 1994. With its distinctive yellow colour, the T-5R really stood out like an exclamation mark on wheels. This special model was intended to be manufactured in a run of 2,500 cars. The turbocharged engine with intercooler produced 240 hp and 330 Nm of torque. The equipment on the car included special spoilers, a square exhaust pipe and 17” Titan alloy wheels. The yellow cars sold out in a couple of weeks, and so the same number of black cars were produced, finally followed by a run of 2,500 dark green T-5Rs.



1994 was also the year when Volvo returned to the racetrack – and did so in an extremely eye-catching way. When two 850s drove up to the starting line for the season premiere at the Thruxton track in southern England, they were the estate version! Competing with a “van” in Europe’s most prestigious standard car series, the British Touring Car Championship (BTCC) attracted an enormous amount of attention. Volvo invested heavily alongside Tom Walkinshaw Racing, with the two cars being driven by the Swede Rickard Rydell and the Dutch driver Jan Lammers. In 1995, estate cars were practically made illegal by rule changes and Volvo switched to the saloon model. That season Rickard Rydell came in third place overall in the championship.



Right from the outset, the press called the Volvo 850 “the world’s safest car”, and in 1995 it introduced another world first in terms of safety. At this point, the Volvo 850 became the first mass-produced car to come with side-impact airbags.

The 850 AWD – the company’s first four-wheel-drive car – was a pioneer for Volvo when it was launched in 1996. The 850 All Wheel Drive had four-wheel drive engaged at all times – a viscous coupling automatically distributed the power between the front and rear wheels. If one of the rear wheels started to spin, the electronic TRACS anti-spin system automatically distributed the power between the front wheels to the one with the best grip. The 850 AWD was powered by a newly developed engine with light pressure turbo boost producing 193 hp, and was a predecessor to Volvo’s four-wheel-drive XC models.

1996 was the final year the 850 was in production. When the models underwent a major upgrade in 1997, the designations were changed to S70 for the saloon models and V70 for the estate version. A total of 1,360,522 cars were built in model versions originating from the 850 series.

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Volvo Car Group in 2015

For the 2015 financial year, Volvo Car Group recorded an operating profit of 6,620 MSEK (2,128 MSEK in 2014). Revenue over the period amounted to 164,043 MSEK (137,590 MSEK). In 2015, global sales reached a record 503,127 cars, an increase of 8 per cent versus 2014. The record sales and operating profit cleared the way for Volvo Car Group to continue investing in its global transformation plan.

About Volvo Car Group

Volvo has been in operation since 1927. Today, Volvo Cars is one of the most well-known and respected car brands in the world, with sales of 503,127 in 2015 in about 100 countries. Volvo Cars has been under the ownership of the Zhejiang Geely Holding (Geely Holding) of China since 2010. It formed part of the Swedish Volvo Group until 1999, when the company was bought by Ford Motor Company of the US. In 2010, Volvo Cars was acquired by Geely Holding.

As of December 2015, Volvo Cars had almost 29,000 employees worldwide. Volvo Cars’ head office, product development, marketing and administration functions are mainly located in Gothenburg, Sweden. Volvo Cars’ head office for China is located in Shanghai. The company’s main car production plants are located in Gothenburg (Sweden), Ghent (Belgium), Chengdu and Daqing (China), while engines are manufactured in Skövde (Sweden) and Zhangjiakou (China), and body components in Olofström (Sweden).

Keywords:

850, Press Releases, 1991, Product News

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