

Press Release

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The work horse becomes lounge lion - The Volvo Amazon estate turns 50

"A new Volvo Estate car. An exclusive estate car, designed for European conditions enters the Swedish market. It will be shown for the first time at the Stockholm Motor Show. It is Volvo's much longed for Amazon estate."

The quote is from a press release published on February 15 1962 and issued by AB Volvo. Two days later, on February 17, the Stockholm Motor Show opened. With the new car, Volvo made its work horse into a lounge lion; a comfortable and elegant five-door sedan with extra load capacity and many more practical features.

In parallel to the new car, the popular Volvo Duett continued to be offered for another seven years which gave the Volvo customers with larger transport needs than average more to choose from. For the family with children, the more modern Amazon made life much easier, the travelling salesman could travel in more style and the craftsman got much better access to the luggage compartment through the rear doors and the split tailgate.

"The new estate is a new Volvo model, for which the existing components of the Amazon have been used to the largest possible degree. The result is a fast and roomy passenger car with an extremely good load capacity. Four doors and a split tailgate enhance the positive character just as the design, the quality, the road manners and the overall economy. The aim has been to create a spacious family car for long-distance travelling and leisure needs - a functional car which can also be used professionally. It is called the Volvo 221 Amazon."

This is a description which - except for the tailgate - also characterises a Volvo V line car of 2012. The price for the new car when launched was SEK 14,475 plus tax with a 75 hp engine; about SEK 1,000 more than the corresponding sedan version. If converted into today's money value it would be approximately SEK 160,000.

Comfort a key property

In true Volvo fashion the fact that the passenger compartment could be turned into a sleeping compartment was also highlighted. But the word comfort was mentioned before the word luggage compartment since the Amazon was the first Volvo estate based on a passenger car rather than a delivery van with a separate frame like the Duett.

The Volvo team had worked both cleverly and cost-effectively. The elegant lines of the Amazon sedan had been retained and transferred in an elegant and efficient way to the estate, The roomy rear section of the body had been done without altering the exterior dimensions, largely thanks to Jan Wilsgaard who had designed the Amazon in the first place.

Halfway along the long roof, at B-pillar height, there was a reinforcement pressing to maintain rigidity. The upper sections of the rear doors were straight and followed the roof line, only the window frames had been re-designed. The doors themselves were the same as those on the four-door version. The rear section of the body was supported by a box-section sub frame and the rear suspension had been modified and lowered in order to make the luggage compartment floor as low as possible.

Clever solutions

The tailgate was horizontally split in two. In the lower half, the number plate holder rested on hinges which meant that it folded down and became visible from behind when the lower part was open. In this folded position, the gate was supported by the flat and rubber-clad upper parts of the

bumper over riders which also served as footsteps when reaching up to the roof rack - a popular standard accessory - or something inside the car with the lower tail gate section closed. Practical and clever.

The luggage compartment was 183 cm long and 126 cm across with the rear seat folded down. Load capacity was 490 kg, only ten kilos less than the Duett. Performance, drive and ride properties were equal to those of the sedan version and that the estate body was efficient in terms of drag was illustrated by the fact that it topped over 140 kph with a 75 hp single-carburettor engine and a weight of 1250 kg.

The introduction colour mist green - with upholstery in a combination of brown fabric and vinyl - was only available during the first year and it was much more common to see the cars in white, beige or blue. The sportiness was later underlined with the letter 'S' for cars with twin-carburettor engines.

Just like other Amazons, the estate remained virtually unchanged design wise except for minor trim details over the years, but technically it benefitted from Volvo developments. In 1964, the front wheel drum brakes were replaced with power assisted disc brakes and the seats were vastly improved. 1968 saw the introduction of a collapsible steering column and engine power rose to 115 hp in the most powerful version. Furthermore, the first exhaust emission control system was introduced on US market cars.

In 1969 the B20 engine replaced the faithful B180 wonder and during the same year, the model went out of production after just over 73,000 cars had been produced. The Duett also ceased production that same year but the Volvo customers who needed and wanted space did not have to worry. The Volvo 145 had been introduced the year before and was offered in two versions. It was yet another step forward: more modern, more comfortable and even safer.

The Amazon estate was a car that found customers in all parts of society. As opposed to many other cars on the market, it did not reveal anything about its owner's social status or prestige, just that he or she was very sensible and practical when it came to the choice of car. An early life style attribute indeed, and years before this was formulated by market analysts and expert demographers in the business.

A collector's car today

Mint condition Amazon estates from the first mist green model year can unfortunately not be found anymore but several cars with very low chassis numbers have in fact survived in spite of the fact that estate cars in general lead a harder life than sedans. Most frequent are cars from 1965 to 1967, but they are still uncommon since relatively few were built. Real fine examples are rarely sold and always fetch more than the sedans, except for the 123 GT. In the Volvo Museum the last estate built, chassis number 73220, is displayed. It is dark blue and left the factory on October 15, 1969.

For more information, visit www.media.volvocars.com or contact heritage@volvocars.com

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