

Press Release

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50 years ago: the PV444 becomes the 544 in August 1958

When the Volvo Amazon was presented in late summer 1956, most people were convinced that the PV with its already rather old-fashioned styling wasn't going to survive that much longer. However, the PV with its loyal customer base and healthy sales figures both in Sweden and overseas experienced something of a second wind. On August 25, 1958, Volvo unveiled a thoroughly reworked PV model named the 544.

It wasn't often that economist Assar Gabrielsson made a miscalculation but it did actually happen a couple of times during his years at Volvo. One such case was his planned total production of 8,000 cars in the PV 444 range, a prediction which was later revised to 12,000 cars. Neither of his estimates quite matched up to reality: many years later, the production total actually sailed way past the 200,000 mark. And if the PV 544 derivative is included in the total run, the final figure is almost half a million. The little humpbacked PV was produced in a variety of versions between 1947 and 1965, defying the predictions of many industry observers. All told, the PV was produced in 15 different model series: eight 444 series and seven 544 series. If you were to ask anyone aged over 45 which car model they feel truly symbolises the Volvo brand, the answer, 99 times out of a hundred, will be the PV!

One-piece windscreen was the big news

The basic body-shell was the same as that of the 444 but the big news for the 544 - the car was designated as a five-seater, hence the figure "5" in its name - was the large new one-piece windscreen. The 444 had featured a split windscreen all its life for repair and insurance reasons, but by 1958 there were virtually no cars left with such an old-fashioned appearance. The large new windscreen considerably improved the PV and made the car's interior far brighter.

The PV 544 got off to a great PR start on the vital US market in the form of its "sparring partner". During Ingemar Johansson's build-up to challenge the world heavyweight boxing title in the USA in the spring and summer of 1959, Ingo, as he was known, was partnered with another Swedish challenger, a new white PV 544 featuring white tyre sidewalls and the attractive so-called America bars above the bumpers. Ingo's trainer Nisse Blomberg had a dark car with the same specification and drove slowly behind Ingo whenever the boxer was out running. The cars naturally attracted considerable interest and were shown in many newspapers, particularly after Ingo's world-famous right-hand punch on June 25.

Survivor

The continued production of the PV, however, highlighted economist Gabrielsson's thorough and accurate accounting. The car was relatively cheap to build and, with the help of ongoing technical development at Volvo, could be kept up-to-date under the skin and even boast exterior improvements fairly simply and inexpensively. However, the PV was never fitted with disc brakes - unlike the Amazon. Another technical weakness that the 544 inherited from the 444 was the doors' exterior handles, which resembled household door handles and which made the doors rather difficult to shut and inevitably became troublesome over the years. In most other respects, however, the model approached perfection.

During the 1960s, the PV 544 lived on in relative anonymity with relatively few production changes every year but it still had a faithful customer base. That the car was beginning to feel old-fashioned

was well-known at Volvo and was a problem for the company, but it was quite simply such a good car! Or, to quote the American motoring magazine Road & Track from November 1963: "Above all the Volvo PV544 is a practical car. Volvo's most attractive appeal lies in its solidity and its quality in every single respect. There is nothing slapdash or under-dimensioned about any part of the car, and that is more than enough to compensate for any perceived lack of glamour."

The last car produced was a black Sport model

The only other cars that still continued in production with twenty year old designs were Germany's VW and Britain's Morgan. The clock could not be stopped. The PV544 was presented in August 1965 as a 1966 model and then it was time to say goodbye. At 3 pm on the afternoon of October 20, 1965, the very last PV, number 440,000, a specially painted black Sport with red interior trim - left the assembly line in the Lundby factory. That car can be seen today at the Volvo Museum. The Amazon now remained the sole standard-bearer of the Volvo family car range for one year before it was joined - and fairly quickly dethroned - by the Volvo 144.

Incidentally, did you know that:

- when the last PV544 series was unveiled as a 1966 model, the price in Sweden was SEK 13,000 for the Special and SEK 13,600 for the Sport.
- the practical radiator blind that was introduced on the PV back in 1950 disappeared in August 1964 with the introduction of the 544 F model. By then the model had already been fitted with a thermostat for the past two years.
- the PV was never available either as the 444 or the 544 in right-hand drive or with four doors. Neither was the car ever equipped with a clock.
- a 1964 PV544 won the 1965 East African Safari Rally in the hands of the Indian/Kenyan Singh brothers.
- in later years, the PV544 has competed with considerable success in the Carrera Panamericana road race in Mexico.
- the PV544 was a highly successful competition car in both rallying and racing, with several championship titles to its name.
- of the 440,000 PVs built, 160,000 were exported and 280,000 stayed in Sweden. Many of these can still be seen virtually every day on Swedish roads, serving as faithful everyday transport.

For more information about Volvo's classic car models, www.volvocars.com/heritage

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