

# Suburban Automotive Showcase

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## Volvo 850 a safe bet for durability

By Anne Fracassa  
Avanti NewsFeatures

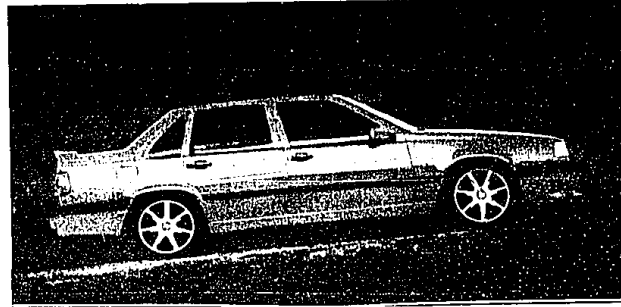
Volvo has always been known for safety and durability.

My cousin Sue bought one just before her first born arrived. The kid turns 15 this year and her Volvo is still going strong. What's more, she's walked away from a couple of serious crashes.

So confident is this company about its safety record that all new Volvos come with an "Accidental Loss of Life" insurance policy. The policy is paid for by Volvo and contributes \$250,000 to the estate of any occupant of any 1996 Volvo who loses his or her life in the car as the result of an accident.

Last year, Volvo further enhanced its standing in the automotive safety world by offering the first front-seat side-impact airbags on the 850 line. This year, the airbags are standard equipment on all models. More on that later.

Tested was the Volvo 850. It's outfitted with a powerful normally aspirated in-line 5-cylinder with double overhead camshafts and two valves per cylinder that provides 168 horsepower. The normally aspirated models are available with a 5-speed manual or auto-



matic transmission, but the turbo



ROAD TEST  
By  
Anne Fracassa

model is equipped with an automatic transmission only.

The automatic transmission is unique in that it offers the driver three driving choices: Economy, sport and winter/hot. In the winter/hot mode, the first and second gears are locked out to help the car get rolling on slippery road surfaces. Available equipment includes a traction-control system.

As always, this Volvo has a comfortable, steady ride. It's provided by a MacPherson-strut sus-

pension system with antiroll bar and a rear Delta-link suspension system. The rear system uses separate coil springs and shock absorbers on alloy lower control arms connected to separate short links. Available on the wagon model are self-leveling shock absorbers.

All models are equipped with 4-wheel antilock brakes and power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering. As large as this wagon is, it's got a turning circle of just 33.5 feet.

Pricing on the 850 models start at \$26,125. The high-end turbo model, fully equipped, can cost \$38,335. But even with the \$26,000 model, you'll see a lot of standard equipment such as air conditioning, 15-inch all-season tires mounted on steel wheels, an 8-way power adjustable driver's seat, 6-speaker 80-watt stereo with CD-compatible AM/FM cassette, power windows, mirrors and door locks, dual controls for heating and cooling and 60/40 rear seats.

All 850 wagons are equipped with an integrated child booster cushion that helps kids to be properly positioned in the center rear seat. There's even a 3-point seat belt. It's an option on the sedans.

The rear deck of the wagon provides nearly 37.1 cubic feet of space. With the rear seats folded down, that cargo room increases to 67 cubic feet.

Back to the side-impact airbags. Volvo designed these airbags a lot differently than other manufacturers have. Other carmakers have introduced door-mounted side airbags.

Volvo has a seat-based side airbag that is always in position to protect the driver or passenger, regardless of where the seat is located on its tracks. This system is also mechanically triggered and doesn't require a complicated computerized sensor to detect a crash.

The side bag measures just 1 foot x 5 inches and deploys in between 4 and 6 milliseconds. Total elapsed time from first

impact sensing to bag inflation is less than 12 milliseconds, according to documents from Volvo.

This is how it works: When the sensor detects an impact of sufficient force, the sensor triggers the side airbag system, automatically setting off a pyrotechnic charge that activates the gas generators in the seat back. Expanding gasses inflate the bag, splitting the seam in the edge of the seat back.

The bottom line is this — the side airbags are designed to absorb energy from a side impact and channel it away from front-seat occupants. The system actually transfers the energy from the crash to the other side of the car and into the floorpan.

The side airbags are designed to reduce head and chest injuries by keeping occupants from slamming into the door, B-pillar or window. The surprising thing is that more than 30 percent of all crash-

es are side impacts. Front airbags do not deploy in a side impact, which is where the most serious injuries occur.

Volvo again sets a standard for safety with the side airbag. Look for more automakers to jump on this bandwagon.

Consider the 850 a strong car, a safe car and a good value.

### 1996 Volvo 850

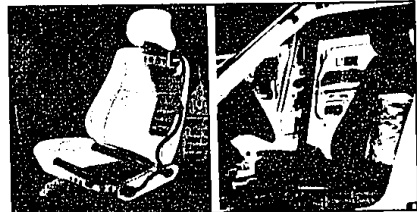
Vehicle class:  
Large luxury sedan  
and wagon models.

Engines:  
Naturally aspirated 2.4-liter dual overhead cam in-line 5-cylinder.

Mileage:  
20 city / 29 highway.

Where Built:  
Torslanda, Sweden,  
and Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Base price:  
\$26,125.



If you'd like to see a particular model tested or if you have a car question, send Anne Fracassa a message at AVANTI 1054, Avanti's America Online mailbox...

Or comment through the Internet at AVANTI1054@aol.com  
Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti News Features.

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