

buyers guide

VOLVO 140/240

More durable than the average tank and dirt cheap, the Volvo 140/240 is a classic you can use every day. Will Holman invites you on a guided tour

IF YOU'RE looking for glamour, skip this feature. If you fancy a classic car, but are worried about your investment crumbling away in front of your eyes, read on. These cars redefined the word tough, as applied to cars. They laid the solid foundations of Volvo's image for producing ultra-safe cars.

Volvo's numbering system is refreshingly simple to understand, unlike some German manufacturers who seem determined to keep details of their cars' specifications a secret from all but a few tech-heads. The first digit is the series number; the second refers to the cylinders and the third, the doors. So 145 is a four-cylinder, five-door estate; the 164 a six-cylinder, four-door saloon. The S after the

model number denotes twin carbs and E means the engine has fuel injection.

From the windscreen back, the body panels are common to 1- and 2-series cars, so parts are still available from Volvo and reproduction panel suppliers.

Although the cars are big, the estate actually has less load space than the Amazon equivalent. The cars are also much heavier than their predecessors and the 1778cc versions are no roadburners. Most four-cylinder cars will have the 1986cc engine, which has more torque.

BODYWORK

YOU CAN'T argue about the merits of the basic shell — it remained unchanged

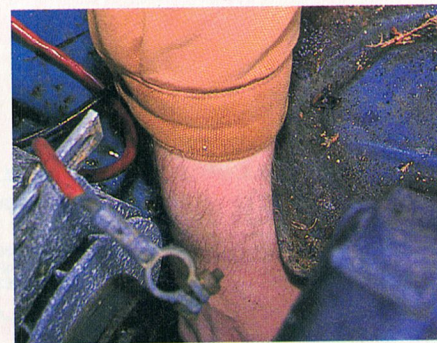
from the launch of the 140 in 1966 until the 240's demise in 1993. The all-steel monocoque is immensely strong and built from high-quality steel. An effective underseal protected the car's underside and, although it can eventually dry out and start to lift off, it's not unusual to find a car with it intact.

Nonetheless, even Volvos will rust given the right conditions, and sometimes in areas you wouldn't expect to give problems. The front crossmember that supports the suspension on 140 series cars can rust out at the front, while the back is usually sound, thanks to a smattering of oil from the engine.

The 140 shell remained basically unchanged until the 240 replaced it in



LEFT: open the bonnet and check the area where the hinges mount to the inner wings. This one has completely rusted away.



RIGHT: feel under the battery tray to make sure there are no rust holes. Water can sit here if the car's been standing.



LEFT: still under the bonnet, inspect the seam where the inner wing joins the front panel — there's a water trap here.



RIGHT: rust can get a hold around the mounting hole for the indicator unit. Look for signs of bodged repairs or the use of filler.

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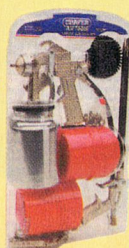
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Volvo 140/160 and 240/260, 1966-93. Solidly built and reliable everyday classic with four- or six-cylinder engines. Unparalleled rust resistance and excellent spares availability. Enthusiastic club. £200-£2500

1974, but there are detail differences.

Early B18-engined cars have a different front panel to the later 2-litre models. If this is rusty or damaged, beware. The panels are unavailable new and scarce secondhand. When inspecting this area, check that there is a visible seam between the panel and the wings. A smooth join is a sign that somebody's bodged the panel with filler. The rust often starts around

the indicator mounting hole, and this is difficult to repair properly. You can use a later panel, which is available, but its bumper mounting point holes and air vent apertures are in different places, so it will need modifying before fitting.

Front panels for the six-cylinder 160 series cars are unavailable, so check carefully before buying.

The 145 estate version had rear

opening side windows fitted until 1971.

The catch for these is bonded directly to the glass and, with time, the glue weakens. The first most owners know about this is when they shut the tailgate. The resultant increase in air pressure inside the car is often enough to break the bond between catch and glass, causing the windows to fly out and smash. They're unavailable new and almost unheard of secondhand.



Squeeze the bottom of the B-post where it joins the sill. Any movement here indicates serious corrosion.



Inspect the area around the bottom of the windscreen. Water can get trapped behind the seal and cause rot.



Grab the bottom of the door and feel for rust. Unless the drain holes are blocked, it will usually be sound.

ENGINE

THE 140 SERIES was fitted with the B18 1778cc engine from the Amazon until 1968, when the 1986cc B20 unit replaced it. B18-engined cars were only sold in the UK for a year so most will have the B20, which is more suited to the task of hauling the weighty Volvo about. Both units are simple, heavily engineered pushrod engines which can cover massive mileages without problems.

'It's one of the most indestructible car engines ever built,' says Volvo enthusiast Matt Skaddon. 'They regularly cover 200,000 miles before they need rebuilding, although valve guides and camshafts may need replacement at about 100,000 miles.'

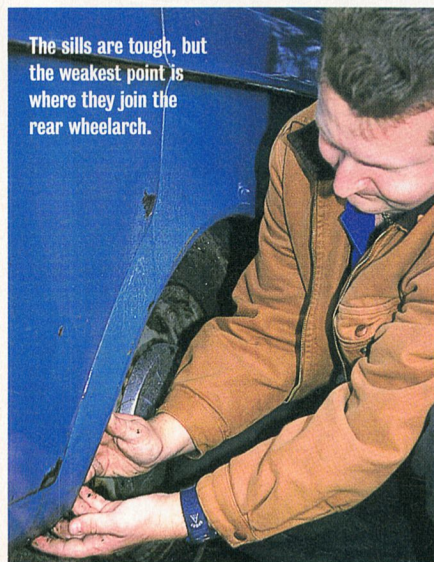
Even after 200,000 miles, engines don't

always need reboring. You should, however, always treat them to Volvo oil filters. Lesser brands don't have non-return valves and when the engine is started from cold, it suffers from oil starvation for the first few seconds. The top end of the engine suffers most under these conditions, resulting in rocker shaft wear.

Listen for clattering from the engine's rocker gear. Shafts are available and replacement is simple because you don't have to remove the cylinder head.

A rough idle could just mean a tune-up is needed, but it could also indicate a worn cam. Listen for a low-speed clicking noise which rises with engine revs.

Check for oil leaks around the rocker cover. If there's any sign of leaks, remove the oil cap with the engine



The sills are tough, but the weakest point is where they join the rear wheelarch.



LEFT: on estates, this area forms the bottom of the spare wheel well. On saloons, it holds a spare fuel can. Either way, it's a natural water trap.



RIGHT: the bottom edge of the tailgate can rust out. The tailgate from a 245 will fit a 145, though, so you might be able to find one in a scrapyards.

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140-160-240-260 SERIES
ESTATES COUPE LIMOUSINE

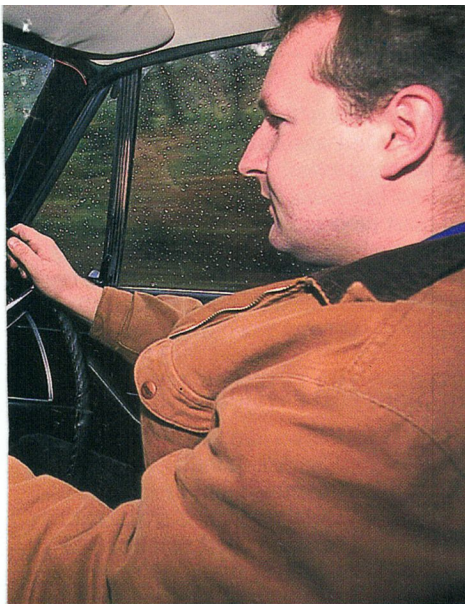
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EARLY 140 SERIES CHROME GRILLE

144 1966 1778cc, 102 IN WHEELBASE, SERVO DISC BRAKES 14-2 1967 2 DOOR, 145 ESTATE 144-5 TWIN SU CARBS OVERDRIVE, 1968 B20 1986cc, 118 BHP UNIT FOR RANGE 1971 FUEL INJECTION 124 BHP 'E' REPLACED BY 240

164 SALOON 1968 WITH SEVEN BEARING, 145 BHP PUSHROD 2978cc SIX.

1972 164E FUEL INJECTION 160 BHP



running and put your hand over the hole. If you can feel gases pulsing past your fingers, then the piston rings aren't sealing in the bores properly. Budget for a rebore and new pistons.

The Volvo 164 was fitted with a six-cylinder 2978cc engine called a B30. 'It's basically a B20 motor with two extra cylinders,' says Matt. 'Even the pistons are interchangeable.' The engine is as tough as its smaller siblings.

Base-model 240-series cars were fitted with the B20 engine, but most had the 2127cc B21. This was also based on an iron block but had an alloy head and a belt-driven overhead camshaft. The B21 may be more technically advanced than its predecessors, but it's just as tough. With regular oil changes and servicing, it will cover 200,000 miles before needing any major attention.

The 260 was powered by a completely different engine, a 2664cc V6 developed with Renault and Peugeot. Known as the B27, the engine is as desirable as the previous sixes. Its vee configuration meant that the six-cylinder cars no longer needed the lengthened front end that the straight-six cars featured.

TRANSMISSION

EARLY 140-SERIES cars had a gearbox without the remote linkage fitted to later models. The synchromesh on second and fourth gear can fail at about 150,000 miles, but even if it does, the gearbox will go on for years in this condition.

The later 'box with remote linkage is bomb-proof, but if the car is fitted with overdrive, check that it engages quickly

OUR EXPERT

MATT Stadden is the 140 Registrar of the Volvo Enthusiast's Club. He bought his first example, a £200 145, when he was 14 years old.

'It's nice to drive a car that you know won't let you down,' he says. The green 144 in the pictures is Matt's daily driver. It has only covered 40,000 miles from new.



ABOVE: you may develop a strange liking for travel sweets and tartan rugs, but at least 140 ownership won't incite you to commit acts of road rage.



LEFT: Britons loved the Volvo 140 series. Only the Americans bought more of them than us, and they're still a familiar sight in 'Good Life' style suburbia.



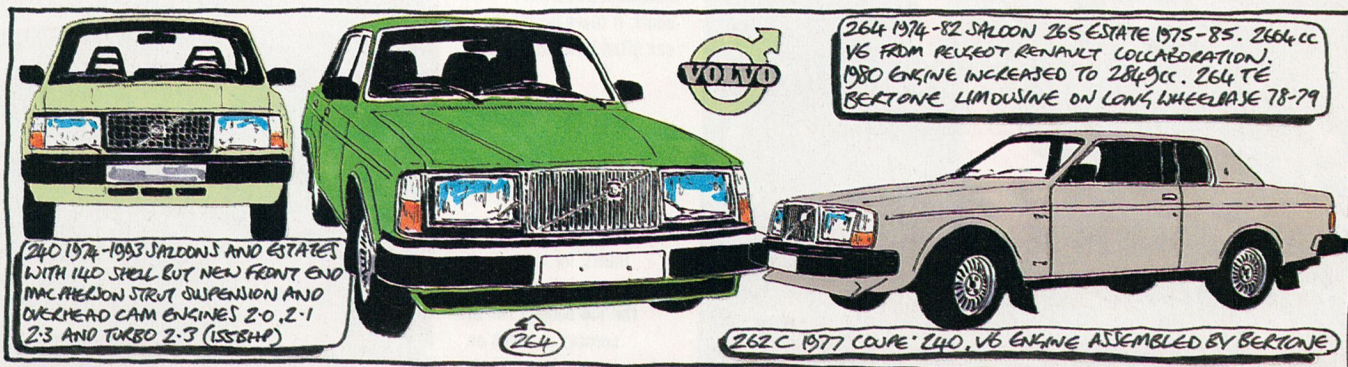
Check that all the windows wind up and down properly. The rail they sit in can rust and part company from the mechanism.



LEFT: on a saloon bootlid, carefully peel the rubber seal back and check the channel it sits in hasn't started to rust.



RIGHT: inside the boot, inspect the inner wheelarch. Rust in this section is a sign that the top shock absorber mounting has corroded.



and smoothly when you operate the steering column-mounted stalk. If the clutch feels overly heavy, the cable is probably about to snap. Non-overdrive cars can be converted to overdrive, but you'll need the propshaft and column switch as well as the 'box and overdrive unit.

Borg Warner three-speed automatic gearboxes were an option on all models, and the units are reliable as long as they're not allowed to overheat. Check the colour of the transmission fluid. It should be bright red. If it's brown or black, then the 'box may well need rebuilding before long.

Volvo back axles have Herculean strength. 'I've never heard of one wearing out,' says Matt. 'After three or four thousand miles, they may start to whine a bit, but they'll go on like that for ever.' (Russ Smith's Chevy V8-powered hot rod has one and he hasn't managed to break it yet.)

SUSPENSION

140/160-SERIES CARS have wishbones and coil springs at the front, and a live axle and coils at the back. The ride is quite firm and the cars don't roll as much as you might expect considering their weight.

If possible, jack up the car under the front wishbone and grab the wheel at its top and bottom points. Try to rock it and, if there is any movement, get an assistant to see where this is occurring. It could be the wheelbearing, a top or bottom balljoint, or the bushes that secure the wishbone to the crossmember. All parts are available to repair any wear in these

areas. Volvo can supply them, as can most motor factors.

The rear suspension is less easy to check in this fashion, so go for a drive. Accelerate hard in third gear at about 40 miles per hour and then lift off the accelerator. If the car seems to change direction slightly, the bushes locating the rear axle are worn. Again, parts are available.

Two-hundred-series cars have MacPherson strut front suspension which can be checked for wear in a similar manner to previous models. Again, parts are available — this set-up survived until 1993, so you can buy bits off the shelf in most motor factors.

Get an assistant to gently rock the steering wheel of the car while you check for wear in the steering box. There should be no more than 1/4in of free movement at the rim of the steering wheel before the wheels start to turn. If the steering box shows more wear, it's possible to adjust it out and Matt says it's

very rare that a 'box will need replacing.

While your assistant is still rocking the steering wheel, look for wear in the various balljoints in the steering linkage. On most models, these are visible underneath the bonnet, but on V6-engined cars, the engine bay is more crowded. On these models, you'll need to look underneath the car to spot any worn linkages.

INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR TRIM

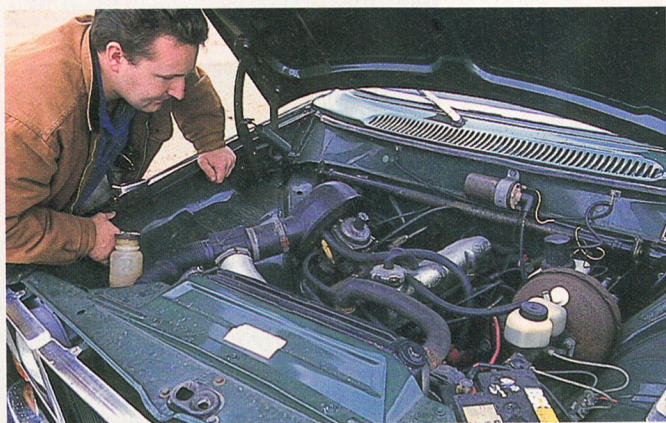
LUXURY MODELS like the 164 had leather trim. Check its condition carefully — it can be retrimmed, but the cost will probably outweigh the value of the car.

Lesser models had vinyl seats and, as you would expect, the materials used are very hard-wearing and long-lived. Seats and trim are unavailable new, but good secondhand parts are available and the Volvo Enthusiast's Club runs a parts finding service for members.

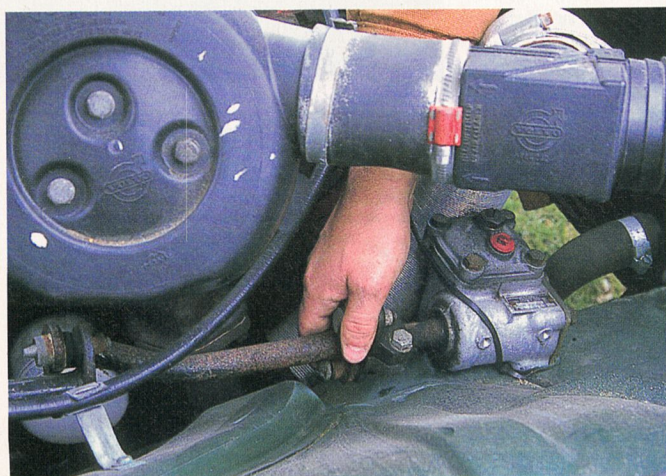
Externally, there's very little chrome to

SPECIFICATIONS

	140 B18 engine	140 B20 engine	160 B30 engine	200 B27 engine
Engine	1778cc/4-cyl	1986cc/4-cyl	2978cc/6-cyl	2664cc/6-cyl
Power (bhp@rpm)	90/5600	115/6000	160/5500	140/6000
Torque (lb ft@rpm)	105/3500	116/3500	170/2500	153/3000
Top speed	99mph	104mph	115mph	112mph
0-60mph	14.5sec	11.5sec	12sec	10.8sec
Consumption	21mpg	19mpg	21mpg	19mpg
Gearbox	4-spd man o/d	4-spd man o/d	3-spd auto	5-spd man
Length	15ft 3in (4.6m)	15ft 3in (4.6m)	15ft 6in (4.7m)	16ft (4.9m)
Width	5ft 6in (1.7m)	5ft 6in (1.7m)	5ft 6in (1.7m)	5ft 6in (1.7m)
Weight	2537lb (1152kg)	2822lb (1281kg)	3040lb (1380kg)	3130lb (1421kg)



LEFT: listen for a clicking noise with the engine idling. If it's coming from the engine block, it's the sound of a worn cam.



LEFT: while an assistant rocks the steering wheel, feel for free play in the steering box output shaft. If there is any, it can often be adjusted out.

RIGHT: for a car that weighs more than 2500lb, the 144 doesn't roll in corners as much as you might expect.





Vinyl interiors are tough and parts are available secondhand, but check the condition of seats. Drivers' seats are the hardest to find.

worry about. Door handles and tailgate hinges on estates are made of Mazac, so rechroming is difficult. Bumpers, trim strips and grills are aluminium, which may corrode, but can be polished until it's shiny again.

VERDICT

IF YOU'RE looking for a classic that you can use everyday, you could do a lot worse than buy a Volvo. A 145 estate with an MoT is a cheap classic workhorse that you can lug all manner of car parts (or

grandfather clocks) about in, without worrying that you're going to break it.

At the other end of the scale, a 164TE is a fast luxurious car that will cover a huge mileage without fuss. Apart from front panels for some cars, just about everything is available. It's one of a select number of classics that can truly rival a new car for reliability.

THANKS TO

Kevin Price and Matt Stadden of the Volvo Enthusiast's Club.



WHAT TO PAY

Very little. A running 144 with an MoT can be had for as little as £300. One in sound condition needing some cosmetic improvement will be about £1000, and an immaculate example shouldn't cost you any more than £2000.

The most desirable cars are estates, S-spec cars with twin carbs, and cars fitted with overdrive. For these, add 10%.

Six-cylinder cars in running condition with an MoT range from £500 to £1000. Even a first-rate, top-of-the-range 164TE with its fuel-injected 175bhp engine shouldn't cost more than £2500.

IMPORTANT PRICES

Prices shown are for 140 series cars

Front disc: £38.54

Water pump: £32.25

Front wing: £117.50 (repro),
£205.63 (Volvo)

Genuine oil filter: £6

Vinyl driver's seat: £25 (used)

Bonnet: £50 (used)

Door skin: £58.75 (repro)

UNAVAILABLE SPARES

Front panels for a 164. Rear side windows for early estates. Everything else is available, much of it from Volvo.

SPECIALISTS

NEW AND USED PARTS

- ❖ The Volvo Enthusiast's Club operates an excellent spares scheme (see below)
- ❖ Amazon Cars, Suffolk (01379 588000)

INSURANCE COSTS

- ❖ £178.30 for £25yo, 2yrs NCB, clean licence, unlimited miles, only car, kept on drive, club member
 - ❖ £83 for 42yo, full NCB, clean licence, 3000 miles, second car, garaged, club member
- Quotes from Firebond (07000 347326) for comprehensive cover for a Volvo 144 valued at £1500 based in Peterborough.

RUNNING UNLEADED

B18-, B20- and B30-engined cars will need an additive or hardened exhaust valve seat inserts. B21 and B27 engines from 1992 are unleaded-compatible, but units built before that will need an additive or hardened exhaust valve seat inserts.

BEST BOOK

Volvo, The Cars from the 20s to the 80s, by Björn-Eric Lindh. Out of print, but look out for it at autojumbles.

JOIN THE CLUB: SEE p166

- ❖ Volvo Enthusiast's Club — £19pa, no joining fee, quarterly magazine, technical help, parts finding service, cheap insurance, discounted parts at dealers/specialists, discounted AA membership
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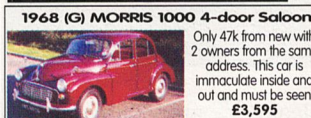
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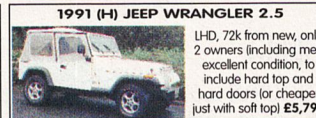
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