

A SWEDE IN ITALY

If you want to stand out from the Mercedes and Jaguar executive crowd, the idea of Swedish engineering and Italian style should appeal. That's what the Bertone Volvo 780 coupé offers . . . at a price. Howard Lees drives it



Picture the scene. As MD of a large Swedish engineering company, your new company car ought to be more upmarket than anyone else's. The trouble is, the company runs an all-Volvo fleet and your production director has just taken delivery of a 760.

Secretly, you don't really want a Volvo at all — something with a bit of Italian flair would suit your image better, but the fleet manager gets nervous about resale values when you mention it. Anxious to keep your business, the local Volvo dealer suggests a Volvo 780 — the finance director breathes a sign of relief as the order is placed.

Honour is satisfied. The Bertone-bodied 780 coupé loses the two rear

doors and the awkward 'sawn-off' rear window of the 760, looking a damn sight better for it. The 'Bertone' badges on the C-pillar are enough to preserve the status quo in the director's car park, but the finance director takes a leap from his 11th storey window when the invoice arrives.

Volvo can't be expecting to sell very many 780s. In Europe it costs the same as a 420SEL Mercedes — that means about £33,000 if it was available here, which it isn't. For such a limited production car, tooling up for rhd would hardly have been worthwhile and even the most committed SDP member would balk at paying that sort of money for a Volvo.

Sales volumes are hardly the point

with a car like the 780 though. For Volvo, it provides a prestige flagship at the top of the 700 range, the 780 being equipped with every conceivable luxury as standard. The co-operation with Bertone goes some way towards answering criticism of Volvo's in-house styling — the problem is simply that all this specialist coachbuilding costs a lot of money.

The 780 first saw the light of day at the 1985 Geneva show, production finally getting underway early in 1986. The cars are assembled complete at Bertone's main Turin factory, built up on a standard 760 floorpan at the rate of about 20 a day.

Volvo supplies the mechanicals from the 760 saloon, including the PRV V6 engine, the three-speed

The standard 7 Series Volvo is not everyone's idea of a pretty car but at least it's distinctive. The Bertone revamp is attractive but has moved the car into a blander Euro-mould, with slight BMW 7 Series overtones (below)

The 780 Coupé goes down the production line at Bertone's Turin plant (bottom)

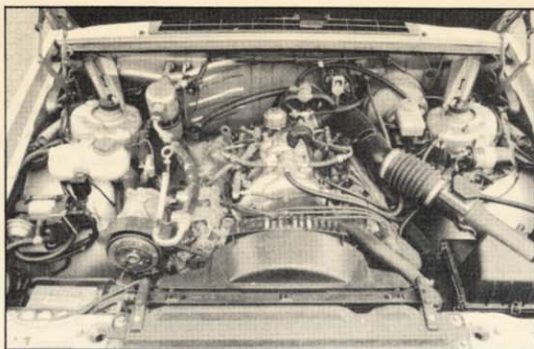


plus overdrive automatic gearbox, suspension and steering. Body panels are a mix of standard Volvo, modified parts and Bertone-produced items, the shells being manufactured on a production line although all the welding is done by hand. All the paintwork, trimming and final assembly is completed in Turin, the cars then going back to Sweden for a final quality control check before reaching the dealers.

With its Dutch subsidiary producing all the 340 and 480 series cars, Holland is a strong market for Volvo. The 780 seems to have created a bit of a stir there as well as in Sweden, so *Autocar's* Dutch contributor Alfred Jansen was able to bring an example over for us to try.

Applying Volvo's quality controls to Italian build standards apparently caused some difficulties in Turin, but our production 780 was extremely well finished. The interior exudes the quality you would expect from a car costing over £30,000 — plush leather seats offer plenty of support for the big businessman and on the driver's side there is electric adjustment of slide, backrest tilt and height — a knob is provided to adjust the lumbar support and electric elements warm the seats automatically on cold mornings. The range of adjustment means there is a comfortable driving position for everyone, even though the steering column itself is not adjustable.

The instruments and controls are taken straight from the 760, which



Power is provided by 2.8-litre V6 to the tune of 170bhp



Coupé retains the cavernous boot of the saloon car



VOLVO 262C

"It's nothing to do with us, we only make it," Bertone's reply to *Autocar* criticism of the Volvo 262C, surely one of the ugliest cars of the 1970s, was correct: it is wrong to tar the Italian design house with a 262C brush.

The 780 coupés 1977 predecessor, despite its unfortunate chop-top styling, was a glimmer of sunshine for a Volvo hit hard by its cars' tank-like reputation and by the demise of its image leader, the 1800ES. This car, popularised in this country by *The Saint* TV show, created an image in the US that Volvo was keen to cultivate.

Lack of cash meant a replacement was out of the question. Volvo boss Pehr Gyllenhammar, after a trip to the US, resolved to provide an 'image leader' to fill the gap.

Jan Wilsaard, head of Volvo styling in 1973, was given the job. According to Graham Robson's book, *The Story of Volvo Cars*, Wilsaard bought a secondhand 164 and sent it, with drawings and spares, to the Italian coach-builder Sergio Coggiola.

The result, based on the by-now launched 260 series and made by Bertone (and, rather unfortunately, wearing Bertone

badges) was not to go on sale until 1977. To discriminating European eyes it appeared a curious throwback at best — and that was after Volvo modified the design. Coggiola had wanted the roofline to be even lower.

Pehr Gyllenhammar, who became so enamoured of the 262C that he drove one as his personal transport, knew that a good European reception wasn't that important: the car was conceived as a US market special, and it was there that the coupé had to succeed. In its three-year life the 6622 were made, all left-hand drive.

means you get white-on-black speedo and tachometer plus a large analogue clock, all uncluttered and easy to read. The wheel itself is the standard item but covered in leather with a padded centre boss, while dash and door panels get the walnut inlay treatment.

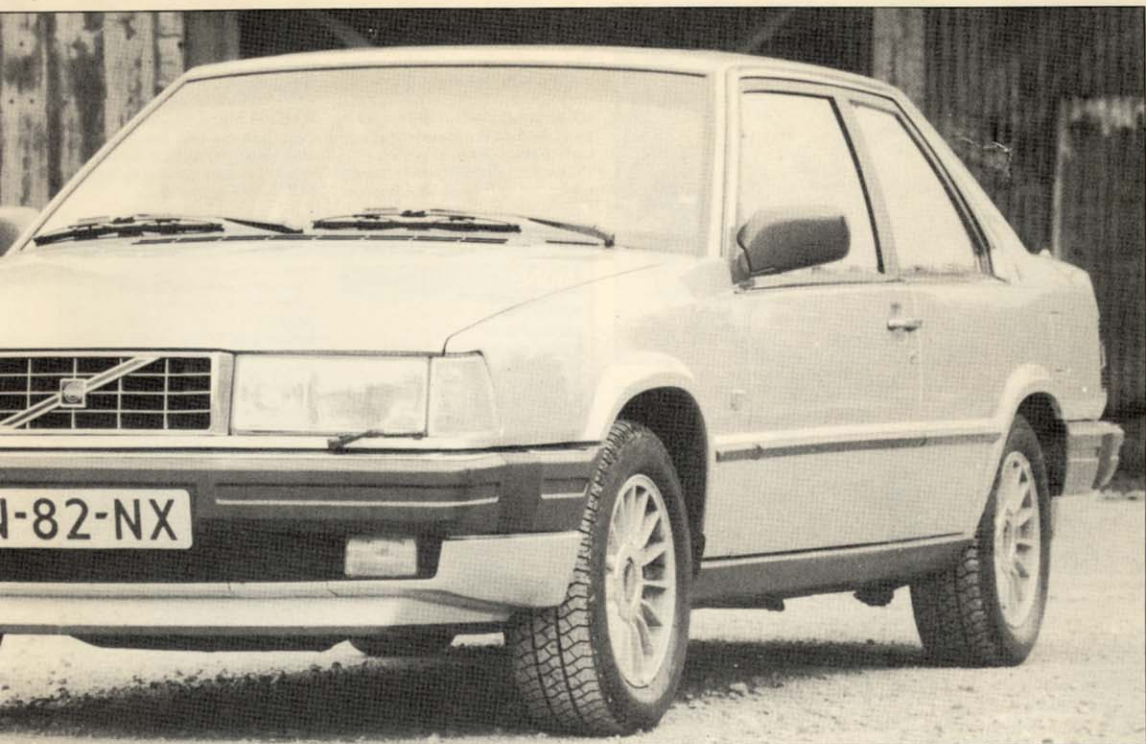
The 780 has all the bells and whistles an executive needs as standard equipment. A cruise control makes life easier on empty motorways, and keeping the cabin environment comfortable is simply a matter of dialing up the desired temperature on the 'automatic climate control' — various sensors adjust the heating and air-conditioning to suit. You also get electric windows, an electric sliding sunroof, remote mirrors and a top-notch stereo system with graphic equaliser and four speakers.

In its Volvo guise, the 2849cc PRV V6 engine has Bosch LH-Jetronic fuel injection and delivers 170bhp at 5400rpm. Coupled to the three-speed automatic 'box it gives the 780 a top speed of 117mph in overdrive and propels the car to 60mph in 10.3 seconds. Although not fast by anyone's standards, the 780 nevertheless motors along quite smartly considering its bulk. The all-disc brakes are very good indeed, powerful and fade-free without excessive servo-assistance.

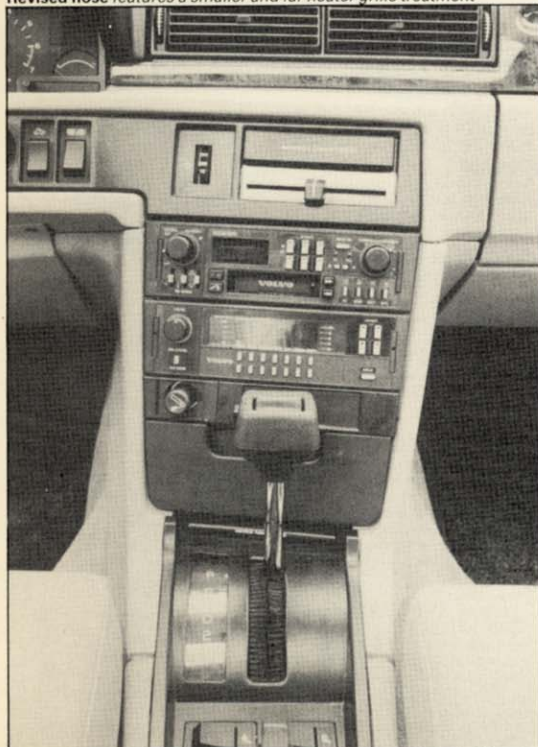
In overdrive the engine is geared at 27.7mph per 1000rpm, making for relaxed 90mph cruising at only 3250rpm. There is very little wind noise to disturb the tranquility of the cabin, and tyre noise is almost totally



Despite its badges the luxurious but badly proportioned 262C coupé was not Bertone's own work



Revised nose features a smaller and far neater grille treatment



Seven-band graphic equaliser and air conditioning are standard

absent. The strut front suspension copes very well indeed with most bumps and irregularities, while the coil-sprung and trailing arm located live rear axle also does a commendable job. The general levels of ride and refinement may not be quite up to Jaguar standards, but they are not far behind.

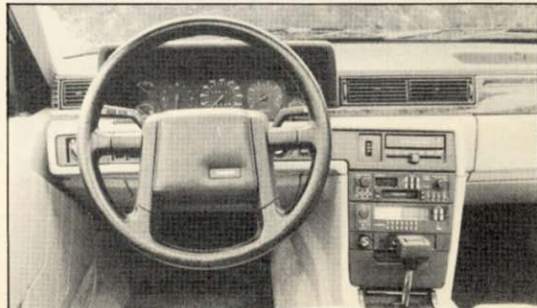
The 780's stability in a straight line is beyond reproach, although the car does tend to 'float' rather over a series of humps. Despite the high degree of power assistance, the rack and pinion steering manages to retain a reasonable degree of feel, and for a car weighing a tonne and a half it turns into corners with some precision.

Tight, twisty roads have never been the native environment of a big Volvo, yet the 780 can be cornered quite hard before it shows signs of getting out of shape. The body roll is well controlled, but not at the

expensive of cornering grip from the 205/60HR15 Michelin MXVs — despite its rear-wheel-drive layout, the 780 demonstrates entirely predictable and increasing understeer as the limit is approached.

The three-speed plus overdrive gearbox is not the most sophisticated unit by today's standards, but full and part throttle upward changes are quick and smooth. On kickdown, the box responds instantly with a down-change, and a button on the side of the shift lever allows the overdrive to be locked out. This stops the box hunting between third and overdrive around town, and a little orange arrow under the tachometer reminds the driver to keep an eye on the revs in third.

The Volvo has lost very little of its practicality in the metamorphosis from 760 to 780. With only two doors access to the rear is obviously ▶



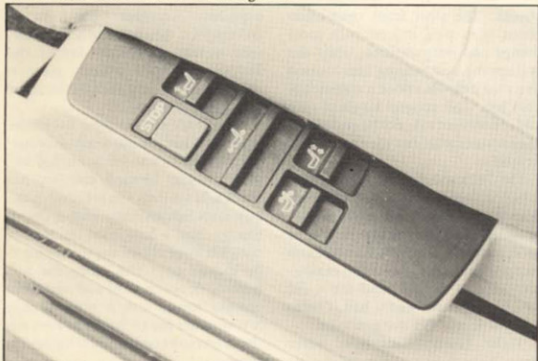
Steering wheel is trimmed with leather



Both seats have the added luxury of a heating element



Seats are leather trimmed throughout



Electrically powered front seats are adjustable in four planes



New rear side window treatment greatly improves the lines

not as easy, but electric motors move the front seats to the front of their runners if the backrest is tilted. The boot opening is also rather smaller than before thanks to the sloping rear screen, but inside there is still plenty of room — there is even a small hatch in the centre of the rear seats to allow skis to be carried.

That the Volvo 780 is an extremely competent and roomy executive sa-

loon is not in question. Its ride, refinement and general handling are excellent, and for an automatic it performs tolerably well. The additional equipment included can't possibly justify the extra £15,000 over a 760GLE, but at the end of the day both Bertone and Volvo have to make money on the deal. If this Volvo appeals, you are going to have to pay for that Italian style. ■

SPECIFICATION

MODEL

VOLVO 780

PRODUCED BY:

Volvo Car Corporation, S40508, Gothenburg, Sweden

ENGINE

Longways, front, rear-wheel drive. Head/block al. alloy/al. alloy. 6 cylinders in line, 90 deg V, wet liners, 4 main bearings. Water cooled, viscous fan.

Bore 91mm (3.58in), stroke 73mm (2.87in), capacity 2849cc (173.9 cu in).

Valve gear ohc, 2 valves per cylinder, chain camshaft drive.

Compression ratio 10 to 1.

Electronic ignition, Bosch LH-Jetronic fuel injection.

Max power 170bhp (PS-DIN) (125kW ISO) at 5400rpm. Max torque 177lb ft at 4500rpm.

TRANSMISSION

3-speed plus overdrive, automatic.

Gear	Ratio	mph/1000rpm
O/drive	0.69	27.7
3rd	1.00	19.1
2nd	1.45	13.2
1st	2.45	7.8

Final drive: hypoid bevel, ratio 3.73.

SUSPENSION

Front, independent, MacPherson strut, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar.

Rear, live axle, trailing and semi-arms, coil springs, telescopic dampers and Panhard rod.

STEERING

Rack and pinion, hydraulic power assistance. Steering wheel diameter 15 1/4 in, 3.6 turns lock to lock.

BRAKES

Dual circuits, triangular split. Front 10.35in (263mm) dia discs. Rear 11.06in (281mm) dia discs. Vacuum servo. Handbrake, centre lever acting on rear discs.

WHEELS

Al. alloy, 6in rims. Radial ply tyres (Michelin MXV on test car), size 205/60HR15, pressures F27 R27 psi (normal driving).

EQUIPMENT

Battery 12V, 66Ah. Alternator 100A. Headlamps 120/110W. 11 electric fuses. 2-speed plus intermittent and flick wipe screen wipers. Electric screen washer. Air blending interior heater; air conditioning standard.

TEST CONDITIONS

Wind: 37mph
Temperature: 23deg C (74deg F)
Barometer: 29.8in Hg (1010mb)
Humidity: 58 per cent
Surface: dry asphalt and concrete
Test distance: 711 miles
Figures taken at 850 km at the General Motors proving ground at Millbrook. All Autocar test results are subject to world copyright and may not be reproduced in whole or part without the Editor's written permission.

Leather seats, cloth headlining. Carpet floor covering. Scissor jack; 2 jacking points each side.

WEIGHT

Kerb 28.3cwt/3168lb/1440kg (Distribution F/R, 58/42)
Test 31.7cwt/3550lb/1614kg

PERFORMANCE

MAXIMUM SPEEDS

Gear	mph	km/h	rpm
Top (Mean)	117	188	4250
(Best)	118	190	4300
3rd	114	183	6000
2nd	79	127	6000
1st	47	75	6000

ACCELERATION FROM REST

True mph	Time (sec)	Speedo km/h
30	3.7	51
40	5.2	64
50	7.7	82
60	10.3	100
70	13.4	118
80	17.6	135
90	22.9	150
100	31.9	168

Standing 1/4-mile: 18.0sec, 79mph

Standing km: 32.5sec, 99mph

ACCELERATION IN EACH GEAR

mph	Top	3rd	2nd	1st
10-30	—	—	—	2.9
20-40	—	—	—	3.2
30-50	—	—	4.6	—
40-60	—	—	4.9	—
50-70	—	—	5.8	—
60-80	—	—	—	—
70-90	—	9.8	—	—
80-100	—	14.2	—	—

CONSUMPTION

FUEL

Overall mpg: 19.8 (14.2 litres/100km) 4.4mpl

COSTS

EQUIPMENT

Automatic	●
Economy gauge	N/A
Power steering	●
Rev counter	●
Self-levelling suspension	N/A
Trip computer	N/A
Headrests front	●
Heated seats	●
Height adjustment	●
Rear seat belts	●
Seatback recline	●
Seat cushion tilt	●
Leather upholstery	●
Split rear seats	N/A
Door mirror remote control	●
Heated rear window	●
Interior adjustable h/lamps	N/A
Sunroof	●
Tinted glass	●
Headlamp wash/wipe	●
Cruise control	●
Fog lamps	●
Internal boot release	●
Locking fuel cap	●
Air conditioning	●
Metallic paint	●
Speakers	●
Aerial	●

● Standard ONC Optional at no extra cost N/A Not applicable