

## **Revvng up the Family Sedan:**

### **Racing in a Volvo S-80**

**By Roger Witherspoon**

The appearance of the speeding car was like a magician's trick: there was nothing there, and then there was.

It was dark, and the Palisades Parkway on the granite escarpment some 400 feet above the Hudson River was encased in one of its episodic blankets of fog. I was as cruising just under the 50 MPH speed limit in the right lane and, becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the large numbers of deer grazing at the highway's edge, decided to move over.

The sight lines in the 2008 Volvo S-80 sedan are unimpeded. The expanse of glass and thin side posts give the illusion you are riding in a glass cockpit. A glance into the rear view mirror and then over my left shoulder showed a clear lane next to me, and I started to slowly move over in the fog shrouded lane. Suddenly, a light inside the window glowed red and I swerved back into the right lane as a motorist in a 70 mile per hour hurry flew by, and was quickly swallowed by the mist ahead. Had it not been for the blind spot information system, we might well have collided in the fog.

But you come to expect unobtrusive safety features in a Volvo, a brand long known for providing sturdy, reliable cars which, in recent years, has begun adding upscale styling to its sturdy image. The blind spot warning lights, on the right and left windshield pillars, are just another indication of how Volvo has used modern technology to make sure its cars have a safety edge. The electronic key, for example, has multiple purposes. Normally, it is left in the pocket or purse, and you just push a button to start the car. The key knows when it is inside the vehicle and turns everything on.

If you leave the S-80 in the darkened or isolated area of a parking lot and are worried about the intruder you saw on a late night B-movie lurking in the back seat you only have to push a button on the electronic key to find out if it is safe to approach the vehicle. At distances up to 300 feet – the length of a football field – the key will tell you if a heartbeat is detected anywhere within the car. If there is one, relock the door, activate the theft immobilizer system and turn on the alarm from the safety of 100 yards away.

This is billed as a family sedan, but the V-8 engine is tuned to crank out 311 horsepower and propel the S-80 from 0-60 miles per hour in just six seconds en route to a top speed of 155. That is a bit faster than the staid image normally associated with Volvo family sedans. It is not surprising that a car designed to hit those speeds comes with electronically governed all wheel drive and traction stability control, ensuring a firm grip on any road surface. It has a six-speed automatic transmission which seamlessly shifts en route to triple digits, providing competition for some of its more expensive competitors.

Inside, Volvo has paid attention to details as well. Volvo wanted the S-80 to feel more like a sports car than a family sedan, so it has a steeply sloping windshield and a low roof line. The wide, padded, leather seats are lower on the floor than you would expect in a sedan, putting you closer to the ground as if you were riding in a roadster rather than a sedan. The front seats, which are power adjustable, can be heated or air cooled, and the system stays on until you manually turn it off, rather than have an inbred timer which cuts it off just as you were getting comfortable.

There is a tilt and telescoping steering wheel with fingertip controls for the audio system and the adaptive cruise control, which slows down the car to maintain a safe distance from the car in front of you and speeds up again when the coast is clear. Volvo gave the S-80 the type of entertainment system you would expect in an upscale road runner. There is an AM/FM Sirius satellite radio which is easy to use and program, and a six-disc, in dash CD and MP3 player with a 12-speaker, Dolby ProLogic II surround sound audio system. The sedan lacks, however, a navigation system – something you have a right to expect in a \$56,000 upscale vehicle.

The center console and control panel have a spare Scandinavian look, a rectangular case with wood inlay which is attractive, if uninspired. The dash has an understated look, with wood accents there and on the doors instead of flashier chrome. And while it is designed to resemble a sport sedan, this is actually a comfortable big person car – a pair of NFL tackles would not be uncomfortable sitting in the back throughout a cross country road trip.

With the sleek S-80, Volvo has developed another, sturdy family sedan with an alter ego that beckons one to crank up the music, floor the accelerator, and go.

## **2008 Volvo S-80**

<b>MSRP:</b>		<b>\$56,025</b>
<b>EPA Mileage:</b>	<b>17 MPG City</b>	<b>25 MPG Highway</b>

<b>Performance / Safety:</b>		
	<b>0 – 60 MPH</b>	<b>6.0 Seconds</b>
	<b>Top Speed</b>	<b>155 MPH</b>

4.4-Liter, DOHC V-8 alloy engine producing 311 horsepower and 325 pound/feet of torque; 6-speed automatic transmission; front independent strut suspension w/anti-roll bar/ independent rear suspension; 4-wheel power assisted, disc brakes; anti lock braking system; 18-inch alloy wheels; active b-xenon headlights; blind spot information system; adaptive cruise control; all wheel drive; stability traction control; curtain side impact and head airbags.

### **Interior/ Comfort:**

AM/FM Sirius satellite radio; 6-disc in-dash CD and MP3 player; Dolby ProLogic II surround sound w/12 speakers; powered leather seats; heated front seats; tilt & telescope steering wheel with fingertip audio and cruise controls; powered sunroof; wood inlays.