

PHOTOS BY DEAN SIRACUSA

SAAB 900

More driving fun in the non-turbo version

BY JOHN DINKEL

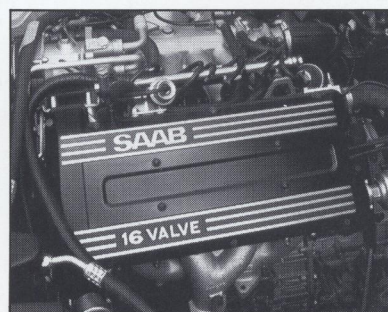
SAABS ARE DIFFERENT. They have been ever since the first front-wheel-drive 92 model with a 2-stroke 3-cylinder engine popped out of Trollhättan, Sweden in 1949. Saabs are also the same, in that body styles don't change often. This latest 900 model traces its lineage back to the Saab 99, which was introduced in 1969.

Dual diagonal braking, impact-absorbing bumpers and turbocharging are among the features Saab has pioneered. So think of Saab as conservative yet innovative. Also think "personality" and "character." To many, the 900 personifies those two words better than any other 5-passenger sedan out there.

As it enters the last decade of the 20th century, the 900 series includes seven models ranging from the base 3-door 900 at \$18,295 (the model we drove) all the way to the Turbo convertible model, which lists for \$33,295. At that base price, the roomy, comfortable 900 can be considered something of a bargain among 5-passenger sedans in general and specifically among its European sports-sedan brethren. Even more of a bargain considering standard

equipment includes a driver's-side airbag, 4-wheel disc anti-lock brakes, headlight wiper/washers, air conditioning, central locking and an electronically tuned AM/FM stereo/cassette sound system.

The 900's new 2.1-liter naturally aspirated twincam 16-valve inline 4-cylinder delivers ample performance and driving pleasure. On paper a dis-



placement increase of 100 cc would hardly seem worth the effort, but the real-world result is a noticeable improvement in bottom-end and mid-range passing performance far in excess of the modest increases in horsepower (up to 140 bhp from 128) and torque (a 5-lb.-ft. jump to 133).

This engine revs smoothly and easily all the way to its 6000-rpm

redline. It's quiet at cruise and makes pleasing mechanical sounds. Its smoothness puts a lot of other inline-4s, including some with balance shafts, to shame.

As a package, the 900 works best when its driver is a willing participant in the shifting exercise. Twenty-eight hundred pounds is a lot of weight for 140 bhp to pull around, no matter how willing the horses. For 1991 the 900's 5-speed has an improved linkage, which guides the lever more precisely from slot to slot. If an automatic is a must (the option costs \$580), we suggest serious consideration be given to the 900 Turbo. However, at \$26,295 for the base 3-door version, that's a steep increase for shiftless driving.

Chassis refinement has always been a Saab trademark and this latest 900 is no exception. There's plenty of wheel travel and good wheel control regardless of road surface. The ride is firm yet supple. The handling is extremely well balanced, low speed or high, with tenacious grip provided by the 900's 185/65-15 Pirelli P2000s. The assisted steering is naturally weighted with a ratio that is as perfect for 90-degree around-town 2nd-gear turns as it is for 90-


mph 5th-gear sweepers.

There's a progressive linear feel to the brakes with a pedal that is easy to modulate just short of lockup. And does anyone control torque steer better than Saab?

While the 900's interior might not seem completely logical at first glance, it is functional. There is roomy, comfortable chair-height seating with no compromise in head room or leg room front or rear. The rear seat folds, extending the already large trunk to cavernous proportions. Gauges are large and readable. The airbag-equipped steering wheel is handsome and its thick rubber rim is easy to grip. On the

minus side, there's a built-to-a-cost look and feel to much of the interior with too many hard plastic surfaces and rubber parts.

Saab offers 1991 buyers a new 6-year/80,000-mile limited warranty with bumper-to-bumper coverage for 3 years/40,000 miles and major system coverage for the duration of the warranty period. Owners of 1991 Saabs are automatically enrolled in Saab's Roadside Assistance Program.

We're glad there are Saabs. Other sedans may offer more "things" for each dollar spent. But Saabs have personality. Saabs are fun. 

SPECIFICATIONS

Curb weight	2760 lb
Wheelbase	99.1 in.
Track, f/r	56.4 in./56.8 in.
Length	184.5 in.
Width	66.5 in.
Height	56.1 in.
Fuel capacity	18.0 gal.

ENGINE & DRIVETRAIN

Engine	dohc 4-valve inline-4
Bore x stroke	93.0 x 78.0 mm
Displacement	2119 cc
Compression ratio	10.0:1
Horsepower (SAE)	140 bhp @ 6000 rpm
Torque	133 lb-ft @ 2900 rpm
Fuel injection	Bosch LH elect. port
Transmission	5-speed manual

CHASSIS & BODY

Layout	front engine/front drive
Brake system, f/r	vented discs/discs; ABS
Wheels	steel, 15 x 5½J
Tires	Pirelli P2000, 185/65TR-15
Steering type	rack & pinion , power assist
Suspension, f/r:	unequal-length A-arms , coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar/ beam axle , trailing arms, Panhard rod, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar

