

fits from its higher curb weight and from the somewhat more progressive supply of torque.

The traffic was quite heavy all the way to Santa Barbara, but as soon as we turned inland, we had the road almost to ourselves. Next on the schedule were a long photo session on a winding country lane, a brief snack stop in the oh-so-Danish tourist village of Solvang, an even shorter halt at the Madonna Inn, and finally the last leg of our trip, which led us back to the coast and to the Inn at Morro Bay. Patrolled by herons, shags, cormorants, and other sea birds, this establishment deserves full marks for its breathtakingly beautiful scenery and the equally stunning food.

At departure time on Day Two, the parking lot was still engulfed in fog as thick as cotton wool, so the top stayed up and we even switched on the heater. Back on Highway 1, direction Big Sur, it did not take us very long to find out that the canvas roof does create some wind noise problems. With the top down, no serious draft bothers the passengers below 35 mph in the back and 60 mph in the front, but with the roof pulled up, the tune played by the elements is quite intense, and even irritating at speed. Another disadvantage that is only obvious when the

roof is closed concerns the rear-quarter view, which is obstructed by what must be the fattest C-posts this side of a Stutz Blackhawk.

Lowering the top—which is what we did when the sun came out to lick up the clouds—is the easiest trick in the book. After releasing the two latches on top of the windscreen frame, all you have to do is engage the hand brake (to make sure the car has come to a stop), start the engine (to support the battery), and push a button between the front seats. In no more than seven seconds, the roof will whirl into its recess behind the rear bench.



Coming in '87: Saab has created a lower, sleeker nose for all 900s.

That's the good news. The bad news comes in the shape of three bumpy PVC segments, which are designed to act as the folding top's cover. Unfortunately, the allegedly easy clip-on installation is a time- and fin-

ger-nail-consuming affair. And the fact that these items further reduce the modest trunk space (owing to the intruding top compartment) as soon as the roof is closed does not exactly enhance their appeal either. Could someone please think of a more professional solution?

After some grumbling over lunch, we continued the easy and relaxed 193-mile drive to Monterey. South of Big Sur, Highway 1 was dotted with construction sites and with "Danger! Landslide Area!" signs, but the Saab coped remarkably well with the worst ripples and undulations. Together with the modified suspension, the extra weight contributes to a well balanced and surprisingly supple ride. The build quality and the car's structural rigidity are also beyond reproach. Even with one wheel parked on the sidewalk and the other three on the pavement, the doors, the trunk lid, and the hood will shut with a reassuring clonk. "Compared to the sedan, the convertible features over 300 uprated or reinforced parts," says project engineer Leif Hautala, adding, "This car is now as solid as a rock."

From Monterey to Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco—via the Napa Valley—was the route laid out for Day Three. We got up early, knowing that the first 175 miles to

the Auberge du Soleil at Rutherford would be larded with heavy traffic, construction work, and congestion. Sure enough, we encountered the first tailback a few miles south of I-280. But in this bumper-to-bumper rush-hour jam, the Saab convertible provided a kind of splendid isolation. You see, standard equipment includes sumptuous leather seats, air conditioning, electrically operated windows, power steering, central locking, remote-control heated door mirrors, a burglar alarm, 195/60HR-15 tires on alloy wheels, and much, much more.

Like its fixed-head stablemates, the topless Saab 900 has its distinctive assets and idiosyncrasies. I like the big, wide-opening doors, the solid locks, the comprehensive instrumentation, the idiot-proof ergonomics, the excellent heating and ventilation system, the sturdy bumpers, and the scrupulous fit and finish. But at the same time I dislike the low headrests, the lack of oddments space, the high loading lip, the insufficiently powerful brakes, and the floor-mounted ignition lock, which requires reverse to be engaged before you can withdraw the key.

After lunch, the time had come to apply one last layer of zinc oxide war paint. Then it was ninety-one more miles to San Francisco, two-and-a-half more hours of "fun in the sun." The B- and C-roads back to I-80 were our last chances to let the car fly. Strong roadholding, plenty of grip, unerring stability, some body roll. The handling? Clean and crisp and unambiguous. Understeer begins early, yet there is a long way to the limit, plenty of warning and no penalty for feathering the throttle or touching the brakes. This car is safe, predictable—and still inspiring.

At the busy Sheraton at Fisherman's Wharf, there was not much time to say goodbye. As soon as we had unloaded our baggage, a driver came and took the car away. I was sorry to see the silver convertible go, and I was also disappointed that this memorable 650-mile drive had passed so quickly. But maybe I shall come back. Maybe I shall even do this trip again in a Saab. Another Saab? Well, this convertible and the significant changes made to all 1987 models of the 900 range show quite clearly that there is a lot more life left in the old lady than some sources would have us believe. ●

## SAAB 900 TURBO 16 CABRIOLET

## GENERAL:

Front-engine, front-wheel-drive sedan  
4-passenger, 2-door steel body  
Base price \$25,390

## ENGINE:

16-valve DOHC, 4-in-line, iron block, aluminum head  
Bore x stroke 3.54 x 3.07 in (90.0 x 78.0mm)  
Displacement 121 cu in (1985cc)  
Compression ratio 9.0:1  
Fuel system Bosch LH-Jetronic injection  
Turbocharger AiResearch, intercooled  
Maximum boost pressure 11.0 psi  
Power SAE net 160 bhp @ 5500 rpm  
Torque SAE net 188 lb-ft @ 3000 rpm  
Redline 5500 rpm

## DRIVETRAIN:

5-speed manual transmission  
Gear ratios (I) 4.53 (II) 2.56 (III) 1.72 (IV) 1.24 (V) 1.00  
Final-drive ratio 3.67:1



## MEASUREMENTS:

Wheelbase 99.1 in  
Length 186.6 in  
Width 66.5 in  
Height 56.1 in  
Curb weight 2920 lb  
Weight distribution front/rear 61/39%  
Fuel capacity 16.6 gal

## SUSPENSION:

Independent front, with transverse wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar  
Rigid rear axle, with Panhard rod, coil springs, anti-roll bar

## STEERING:

Rack-and-pinion, power-assisted

## BRAKES:

10.9-in vented discs front  
10.5-in discs rear

## WHEELS AND TIRES:

15 x 5.5-in cast-aluminum wheels  
195/60HR-15 Pirelli P6 tires

## PERFORMANCE (manufacturer's data):

0-60 mph in 8.7 sec  
Standing 1/4-mile in 16.5 sec @ 85 mph  
Top speed 130 mph  
EPA city driving 19 mpg

