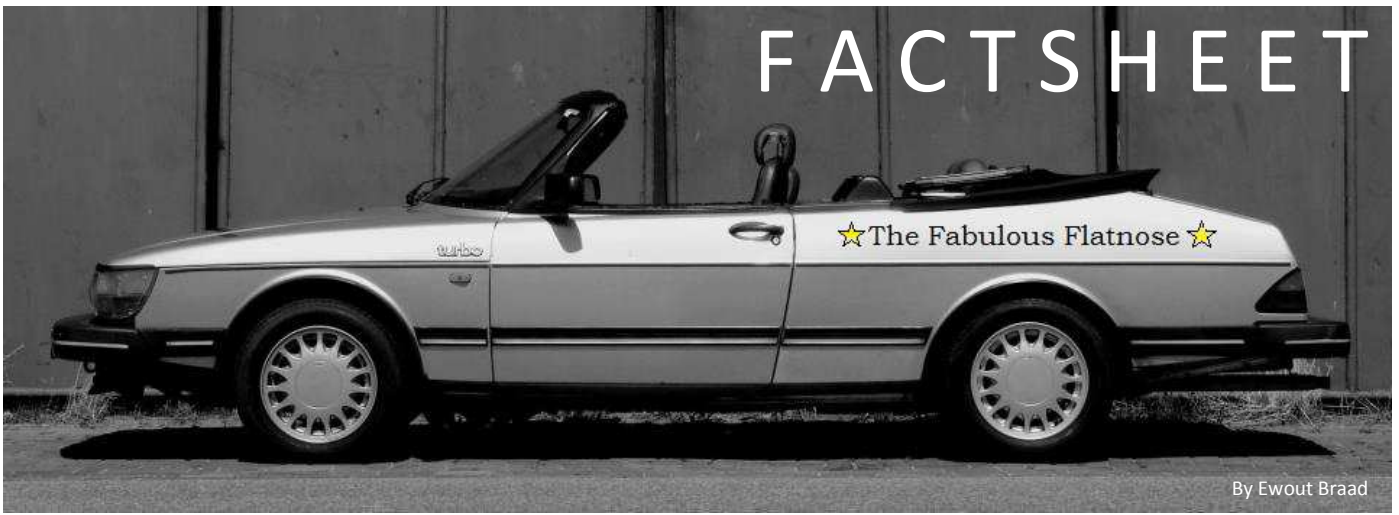


# FACTSHEET



*This document tries to separate facts from fables, by collecting proven statements or truly plausible information from around the world and internet. Everyone thanks for the input! Keep it comin' ☺*

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N.B.: Grey text has not been verified and may not be considered a fact for that matter.

## A. The prototypes

### Definition

A prototype is a hand built (or modified) convertible, built to order before 1986 for R&D purposes. Only three of them were built.

### Prototype no. 1

**Owner** Bernt Tornefjell, Sweden  
**Based on** 1983 900 2-door notchback  
**Color** Solid white  
**Design by** Bjorn Envall  
**Built by** SAAB (car) and American Sunroof Company (conversion)  
**Features** Bottom of the doors are painted black  
**Story** This car was not solid and well-built enough to serve as show car in Frankfurt. Bernt is very careful with this car, but actually drives it now and then.



### Prototype no. 2

**Owner** SAAB Museum, Sweden  
**Based on** 900 2-door notchback  
**Color** Pearl white  
**Design by** Bjorn Envall  
**Built by** SAAB (car) and American Sunroof Company (conversion)  
**Features** Separately moving rear window (as seen on [youtube](#)), rear seat passengers got a window switch of their own on the convertible concept.  
**Story** This car can be seen in the SAAB Museum in Trollhattan. It is the car that was shown to the public at the 1983 IAA in Frankfurt. To ensure maximum impact, the shape of the veiled show car was disguised by a plastic block inserted above the trunk lid to give it the silhouette of a wagon.



With as little as US\$30,000, and only a few months to complete the project, Bob Sinclair's US team (a group of Swedes technicians under supervision of the director of the prototypes department Gunnar Arwidsson) worked with the American Sunroof Company (ASC) to convert the Saab 900 Sedan to a prototype convertible for Saab Sweden. Both prototype no. 1 and no. 2 were built by the American Sunroof Company in Michigan and were kept completely quiet to the public.

It is not commonly known that the IAA show car was in fact the second car to be built – not the first!

### Prototype no. 3

Owner	SAAB Museum, Sweden
Based on	1981 900 3-door combi coupe
Color	Pearl white
Design by	Leif Mellberg
Built by	Leif Mellberg, Nykoping Sweden
Features	This prototype is not really a prototype but a design study. It has a targa top over the front seats and a traditional canvas drop top over the rear seats. The left side is equipped with aero-panels and aero-wheels whilst the right side was standard, yet with the wheels painted pearl white, like the aero-wheels.
Story	This car was flown to Pasadena, California to be compared to the ASC prototype, with the board present to decide which one would be the better. This car can still be seen in the SAAB Museum in Trollhattan



A germane difference between the cars built by ASC and the car built by Mellberg was that the ASC-cars were pre-production prototypes, not show cars. They were made in such a way that they could be manufactured. Mellberg's car was built as a concept car, to show possibilities, which is quite a different approach. But with an automatic operation of the top in less than 30 secs and with only two hooks needed to secure to the windscreen frame, the Convertible of ASC was eventually preferred over Mellberg's car.

The three prototypes were all based on pre-86 models and therefore didn't have the orange directions indicators at the side of the front fenders, that the production cars would have. They also did not have the later adopted 9000-style mirrors. All three cars were equipped with a white soft top. Only the very first prototype (the white one) got its black soft top at one moment in time.



*The solid white, very first prototype, after it got the black top*

## B. The pre-production cars

### *Definition*

Pre-production cars were built in 1985 on the line (not by hand).

The pre-production cars were built after the prototypes (of course), to try out producing the 900 convertible and testing production methods. According to Valmet, at the end of December 1985, **seven** pre-series cars were produced. These cars were most certainly meant to be destroyed or crash tested, since they weren't roadworthy and weren't meant to be sold. Also, some of the pre-production cars were converted to the facelift model, with the slant nose. Of the pre-production cars, four are known to still exist:

Pre-production car 1 (PP1): A cherry red car, built in July 1985, yet to the **1986** model standards (including the side indicators, although it is unclear if it had those from the start). It currently resides in the USA (owner: Bill Jacobson). Also a manual car. In fact, quite a rare car, since it was not converted to slant nose or repainted in a non-original color.



Pre-production car 2 (PP2): A car, built in the first half of 1985, to the **1985** model standards. It currently resides in the Finnish Museum of Transportation in Nystad. This car is now painted pearl white; the original color is yet unknown. It is a manual.



Pre-production car 3 (PP3): A cherry red car, built in November 1985, to the **1986** model standards. It is privately owned in Finland (Juha Lehtonen). This car was also converted to the slant nose, but Juha restored it back to flatnose, which it originally was.



Pre-production car 4 (PP4): A cherry red car, built in the first half of 1985, to the **1985** model standards but with the 1986 'T16' VIN. It resides in Sweden, but was converted to the post-87 model, with the slant nose. It is a manual.

Also, one car is known to have existed, but unknown is if this car is still out there or may be one of the above four pre-production cars. It's a cherry red car, built to the **1986** model standards. This is the 'famous' MSL130. It was used for promotion purposes in Sweden and has been converted to the slant nose (see photo on next page).







*The MSL130 promoting the 1987 model looks*

Check out the Fabulous Flatnose Registry for more information on each of these cars!

## C. The crash-test cars

### *Definition*

These are true Fabulous Flatnoses that were crash tested. Some pre-production cars were meant to be crash tested, so the crash-test cars may well be actual pre-production cars – who knows. Until such crash-test car is identified it will be labeled crash-test car.

Only one crash-test car is known to have existed so far (CT1), of which Valmet showed a photograph from its archives on its Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/ValmetAutomotive>) in January 2016.



It is known that one of the crash test cars donated its roof to prototype number 1 (PT1) later on.

## D. The production cars

### *Definition*

Production cars were built in 1986 to a number of 379 and to model year 1986 standards. All cars had USA specifications (including headlights and of course a catalyst converter).

The production cars are the actual first series of the convertible to be produced for purposes of selling and in this case testing out the market for a 900 convertible. 379 were built, of which 350 went to the USA. The other 29 cars were either declared unfit for sale or used and tested by Saab executives in Europe. Some were crash tested.

Most of the production cars were silver metallic, at least two were white – both are in the registry – and some were cherry red. One of the red cars is in the SAAB Museum with registration MFU848 and the VIN YS3AD75L1G7011412. It was registered as a 119 BHP 900i (as did most of the early cars that didn't leave Europe), but has a T16 engine mounted. The interior is known to fit poorly. This car was up for auction when SAAB bankrupted, but the cars in the Museum luckily were saved.

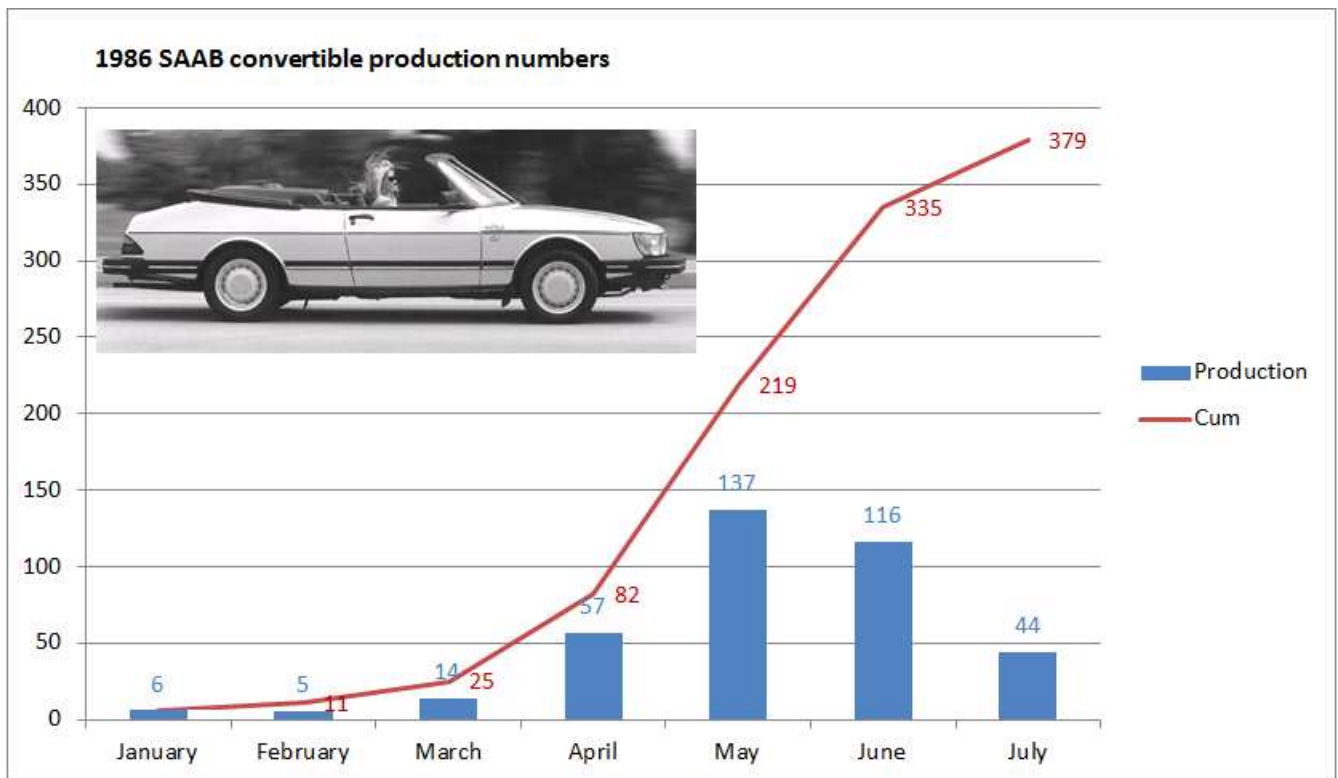


205 cars had the 5-speed manual gearbox and all the cars were built in Uusikaupunki (Nystad) in Finland and were left hand driven.

Each dealer in the United States was assigned one car. The cars sold out so quickly that most prospective buyers did not realize the car was available for sale in time. The cars were sold without being seen. By the time the Convertible went on general sale in 1987, demand exceeded production capacity and a 12 month waiting list built up before facilities at the Valmet plant were expanded. Of course, all these cars were model year 1987, with the slant nose.

## Production numbers

Clearly, the 900 convertible became a success and was therefore taken to serial production by Valmet, to eventually stop at over 48,000 (48,888 or 48,894) convertibles (of the classic 900 model). The 379 production cars of the first flatnose series were built in the following order:



The *production* date of each car is registered in the left door jamb, under the lock interceptor.

## Versions

All cars were fitted with the B202 turbo engine, a 16 valve with double overhead camshafts and a Garrett T03 turbocharger with intercooler. There were different versions, regarding color and gearbox:

*Color:* the production cars were mostly silver metallic, some were solid white or cherry red.



*Silver metallic*

*Gears:* the production cars were either fitted with the 5-speed manual gearbox or the 3-speed automatic.



*5-speed manual gear lever (at least 205)*



*3-speed automatic gear lever (at least 145)*



## VIN and serial numbers

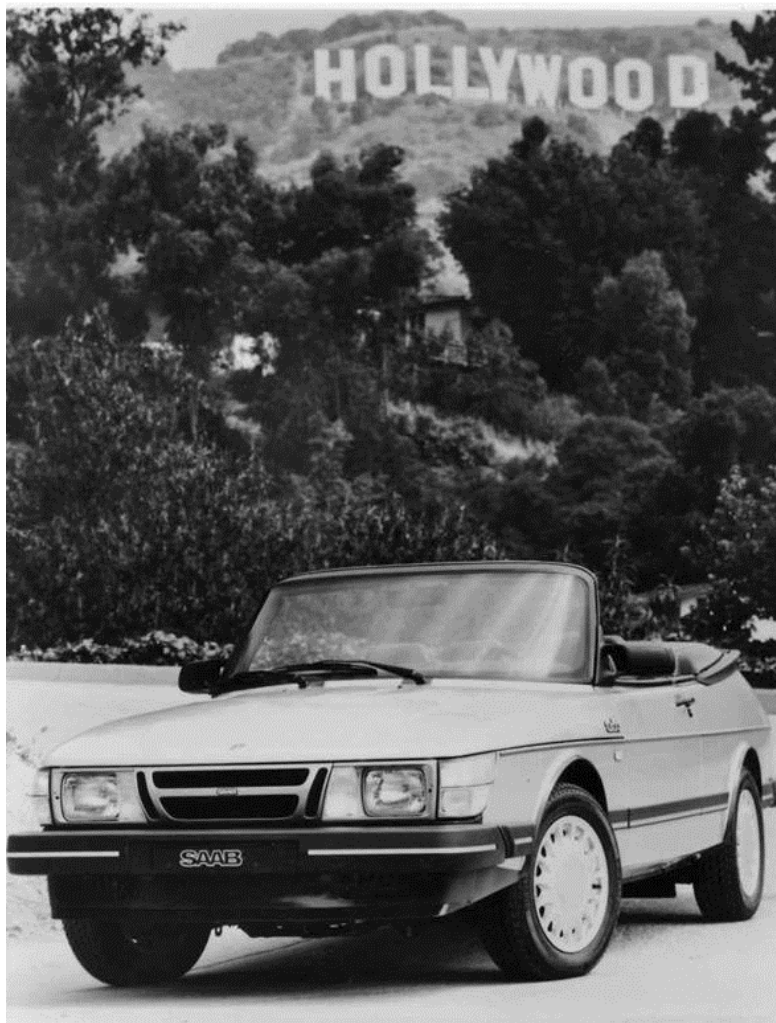
The VIN (vehicle identification number) of each production car is constituted as follows:

**YS3AD7(1)L(x)G7(0xxxxx)**

With:

YS3	indicating the brand SAAB Scania Sweden
A	indicating model range 900
D	indicating a turbo model
7	indicating the convertible body
(1)	indicating the gearbox type: <i>5 indicating the 5-speed manual</i> <i>6 indicating the 3-speed automatic</i>
L	indicating the B202 turbo engine
(x)	being a random digit
G	indicating model year 1986
7	indicating production in Nystad, Finland
(0xxxxx)	being the serial number

The production cars were not numbered in a sequenced order. The last six positions of the VIN number of these cars were however ascending during production, i.e. 011412 was built in January 1986, 022196 was built in March 1986 and 029003 was built in May 1986.



## E. The true story about how it started

Based on Steven Wade's 2011 interview with Bob Sinclair himself (on <http://insidesaab.wordpress.com/> and <http://youtu.be/Jky4v1Lialc>).



*The US market was rocking and rolling by about 1983 or so. Saab was having some difficulty in what you might call the 'lower discretionary income markets'. The Scandinavian markets, the Netherlands – countries that had difficult economies. The pressure from the European markets was to come out with a lower priced car, whereas I was pushing Saab upmarket, adding more content etc – they were two diametrically opposed directions when it comes to product development.*

*I was called over to Sweden with my sales manager and my marketing manager. We met with all of our colleagues from different markets around Europe and we were shown a 2-door sedan that had been stripped – it had no equipment whatsoever. It had stamped steel wheels, it didn't have tinted glass, it didn't have anything. It had wind-up windows, no central locking, no sound system.... and each market was asked how many of these they wanted.*

*The lowest discretionary income markets thought it was wonderful, the middle markets were in the middle and I thought it was an anathema. I said I didn't want any at all. That wasn't well received, coming from the largest Saab market in the world, and I was asked to sit next to the President of the company that night at dinner. He made it very well known that he expected a different answer and I said "Sir, if you ordered me to take them, I'll do that. I'm a good soldier and I'll click my heels and salute. But they're wrong for the market and when it's a disaster, it'll be your fault. But if I say yes and [inaudible]...so my answer is no."*

*It was one of those confrontations.*

*A few weeks later I received a telephone call from the sales manager [in Sweden] and I was told that they couldn't meet our full volume requirements for the next three years. But if I would take 1,000 of those two-door sedans, that would make up the slack.*

*We couldn't sell them with the equipment they proposed – we had federal emissions requirements at that time and (aside from that) we needed heaters, a/c, – and I was told that we could have any equipment that we already offered on our other 900 models. I said I'd think through it and was told that [Sweden] would require an answer the day after tomorrow. I called my sales manager in and I had an 8×10 black and white photograph of that car from a side view. I took a pair of scissors and cut along the top of the doors and I said "How about if we ask them to build them like this?" He looked at me like I was mad and said "what do you mean?"*

### ***I said "Tell them we want convertibles!"***

*He said "Can we do that?" and I figured we'd tell them that's what we want. They don't have to build them.*

*So that's really how the idea came about. A man named Sten Lundin who was the deputy sales manager, called me a few days later and he said "Do we have your decision, can you take those cars?" and I said "Yes, and here's the equipment we want – cast wheels, a/c, tinted glass, central locking, power windows, heated seats....the whole litany.... oh, and one more item: we want convertible tops."*

*Silence.*

*He said "What?!" and I replied "You know, a cabriolet, an electric top that goes up and down." He asked "Are you mad?" and I said "Sten, if you want me to take 1,000 of those two-doors a year, then that's how I want them." He said "Let me call you back." About five minutes later, the President of the company was on the phone and he said "Mr Sinclair, what the hell are you doing now?!" He had his red face on, but I told him there was a huge opening in the market in the United States. All of the manufacturers had assumed that convertibles would be outlawed because of the safety regulations that were coming in [inaudible]. They said "we don't know how to build convertibles over here" but I told them that there were plenty of people who knew how to build them in the United States and I'd be happy to take on the task of the prototype and paying for it out of our marketing budget, and that's how it happened.*

*It was a tremendous success. It was introduced as a concept car at the Frankfurt Motor Show less than a year later and it had an unbelievable response. No-one expected this from Saab. It was covered in canvas. They smuggled it into the building the night before and placed it on a rotunda. The next day when we had the traditional press conference, they lifted the cover and all hell broke loose. It was amazing.*



*Bob Sinclair and Juhani Linnoinen, managing director of the Valmet factory in Finland,  
in one of the first 379 900 Turbo Convertibles built in 1986*



## F. Other variations

Some other flatnose convertibles have been built through the years, but were not 'the real deal'.

### Leif Mellberg's Targa Convertible

Mellberg didn't build just the design study of a 900TC you can find in the prototype section, but also this 900 2.0i Aero-look 900 Targa, for a customer: <http://www.mellbergscustom.com/saab-900-tc-targa/>.



### Valmet's 900 Targa

Valmet Automotive drew a 900 Targa already in 1980, based on a 900 T8.



### 1/87 900 Wiking convertible

Jens Müller from Köln, Germany, built this red flatnose convertible based on a 5-door Wiking model car in the tiny 1/87 scale. Major changes were concerning the doors with new outlines, the soft top and, of course, the paint.





### 900i by Lynx

Only two SAABs 900 were converted to a targa by Lynx UK – a blue and a red one.



### Other conversions

Of course, over the years, people have converted slant nose 900 convertibles to flatnose convertibles, like these cars:



1990 900 convertible – the Netherlands



1987 900 SPG convertible - USA