



completely idiot proof. What is?

It is necessary to clip the front edge of the roof to the top edge of the windscreen, as is the norm. To do this, the folding forward operation of the roof must be halted as the front edge hovers about two feet above the windscreen, whereupon the car's occupants have to reach up and operate two handles at either end of the front frame. This has the effect of opening two hook-like clasps which move in a backward direction from the closed position in which they are stowed to avoid damage to the fabric. When this simple operation is complete, the roof operating button forward of the gear lever can be pushed once more, and the roof will flop the final two feet into a fully closed position. The two handles are pushed home and the claws grab firmly at their seats in the windscreen frame.

Should you forget this intermediate routine, and keep the button depressed, the roof will flop onto the frame as usual, but crash the steel claws heavily onto the black windscreen surround, leaving ugly silver gashes on its surface. One car we tried had unfortunately received such treatment and was scarred accordingly.

Apart from this, everything works beautifully, but it is a shame, when Porsche's Cabriolet can do the whole job automatically, that the roof of this not inexpensive car can't do the same.

When storing the roof, you can cover the folded canopy with the three clip-on pieces as described, one for the rear and one for each side.

We also noticed on one car we tried that the canopy had taken on a slightly crumpled appearance in some places, but this seemed to ease after it had been erected for a while.

### Wind in the hair

There are two things which are worthy of the greatest consideration when driving any soft top. The first is how bad the scuttle shake is, and the second, just how much the wind ruffles your hair.

The Saab has two side windows which, like a four-door, both wind down electrically as standard on this car. With them up, the draught can be described as comfortable at 70mph. And in fact, in the variable temperature range experienced in California where we tried the cars, it proved viable to use both heater and air

conditioning, depending on the day, to balance the temperature comfortably, even with the top down.

Back seat passengers will find the Cabriolet ride a little breezy. They will also find the legroom less generous than in the standard saloon, which itself doesn't have the roomiest of rear seats.

A six-footer will not find much room behind a tall driver's seating position at all, and in fact will find riding slightly sideways-on more comfortable. But soft, comfortable standard leather upholstery helps a lot, and there are front and rear speakers built in, fed by a Clarion HiFi system that could stand much more bass despite its high tech graphic equaliser.

Electric window switches are behind the handbrake and can be reached by all occupants. When raising the hood, windows must be wound down and the quickest way, of course, is to hold all four switches down at once. Doing this however can blow the fuses.

The dreaded scuttle shake problem proved almost non-existent, except on bumpy roads when flexing in the body can be detected. On smooth roads, it would be impossible to tell the difference between the soft top and a saloon.

In mountainous country, the Cabriolet handled well, turning in with a trace of understeer when pushing into quick bends and a little more in the slower bends. Again, there was no evidence that the Saab suffered from being sliced in two.

The US specification emission cars develop only 160bhp instead of the non-emission 175bhp. All Cabriolets are

scheduled for 16V Turbo engines and despite the emission specification, power levels are good. We tried a Borg Warner automatic 'box too, which fared well when up and running but could make the turbo car sluggish from a low revving start. Certainly, for US roads it was ideal, and for regular motorway users, it could be in the UK too.

Perhaps some of the most memorable moments of this new car's launch were provided by the American people themselves. During three days and several hundred miles, about eight people approached us with barrages of questions. On foot in the street, or 'car to car' it was the same thing wherever we went. Words like 'gorgeous' and 'beautiful', were used freely. The final question was always the same. 'How much'.

The answer to that is \$25,000 (£17,006.80), by far the most expensive Saab yet. But for that you get standard leather upholstery, electric windows, electric mirrors, central locking, power steering and, for the USA, air conditioning. That is in addition, of course, to the most comprehensive air-conditioning system of all, the soft top which is the car's whole *raison d'être*.

There's no price for the UK yet, and that will depend on whether the high standard specification remains.

But certainly, the car which has moved from concept to reality in just two years is making an impact in the USA - even as it is launched. It is also adding credence to Saab's claim that though the 9000 is here, the 900 is far from dead.

The secret of the Cabriolet's success is the impressive structural reinforcement of the bodyshell, which utilises a glued windscreen to add rigidity.

