

Volvos since 1971.

By Kevin Greenaway.

Volvo 1800-120 Club and Victorian Volvo Club member.

Volvo 164E TE.

Owned since 1975

Model: 1974

Chassis: A128211

Colour: Metallic Blue with pale blue leather interior.

Registered number: 164 EKG



Until 1971 I was a devoted Fiat enthusiast having owned a 1960 Fiat 1800 (my first 1800), a 1963 Fiat 1500 Mark II, a 1964 Fiat 2300 and then a 1968 Fiat 125 which was ordered sight unseen and the first 125 Fiat to be sold in Melbourne.

Early in 1971 I met a doctor and I was very impressed with his Volvo 142s and then I was even more impressed when, through no fault of his own, the car was involved in a multiple rollover at high speed and neither he nor his wife suffered any injury. I decided on the spot I had to have a Volvo for my next car and when I heard that Volvo were suspending imports and had made the decision to begin assembly in Melbourne I had to make a decision. Would the local assembly models be as good as the Swedish imports? I decided that the Swedes had much more experience in putting these cars together so I ordered a Metallic Grey 144s manual from Sweden and it arrived as part of the last shipment of imports to Australia. I purchased the car through Whitehorse Motors in Melbourne and when I arrived to take delivery there was a chap patiently waiting to buy my Fiat 125.

I was now a very proud Volvo owner and in those days, if you saw another Volvo on the road you would flash your lights and wave frantically.

A few months after buying the car I heard that a group of Volvo owners were contemplating forming a Volvo Club in Victoria. Subsequently I became a foundation member of the Volvo Club of Victoria.

My order had included a sports instrument panel and I then added a small sports steering wheel and radial tyres which had not yet gained universal use. This combination coupled with the lack of power steering made parking manoeuvres extremely difficult to the extent that Margaret refused to drive it. I loved the car but 4 years later I gave in and began a search for a six cylinder 164E which had auto transmission (for Margaret) and power steering.

I was lucky to find a Royal Blue 1974 164E with only 8,000kms for \$8,000 at the Volvo Car Centre, Elsternwick and I quickly bought it. They wouldn't give me enough for my 144s so I decided to try and sell it privately.

At this time I was a bank manager in Ivanhoe and a chap came in to ask for a personal loan to purchase a Ford Cortina. I said, "Why don't you buy a Volvo instead?"

"I'd like to but I couldn't afford one of those." I took him out to my car park, pointed to the 144s and told him he could have it for \$3,500. He agreed on the spot, (didn't even wish to take it for a test drive) and I soon approved a bank loan which he used to pay me. I now had to explain to the Ford dealer, who was also a customer, why I had stolen their client.

I'd owned the 164E for only a week when I took it back to the dealership to have them attend to a few minor faults. While I was waiting for the repairs to be done I noticed a Metallic Blue 164E TE on the lot which wasn't there the week before. It only had 2,000kms on the clock with 10 months registration left and a price of \$9,000.

I immediately went to the salesman and told him not to bother with the repairs as I wanted the TE instead. At first he didn't believe me and then he wanted to reduce the value of the Royal Blue 164 because I'd owned it for a week. Much haggling and I finally convinced him to change over for another \$1,000.

When I arrived home Margaret found it difficult to believe that I'd changed cars after only a week and wasn't convinced until I showed her the paperwork. That was in September 1975. Although the TE had an ADR compliance plate dated 6/1974 it had not been sold until July 1975 and I couldn't



really understand why some one would buy such a beautiful car and sell it after only 2 months. Les Commerford told me about 20 years later that EVERY 164E TE model that was imported into Australia had a 'soft' camshaft fitted which failed after about 1,500 kms. Now I could understand. The first owner had purchased a new car which had failed within 2,000kms so he got rid of it.

Had anyone at that time said to me that I would still own this car 35 years later I would have considered them quite mad. I'd owned 9 cars in the past 18 years, plus another 3 for Margaret to drive. However, here it is 2010 and 'Virgil' still has a place in my garage although he is somewhat retired these days and rarely ventures out.

In 1976 a year after buying the TE, I resigned from the bank and borrowed against the car to assist with finance to buy a share in a Caravan Park at Bonnie Doon in Victoria.

The Volvo served as a park vehicle for three years until I sold my share and headed off to North America for a vacation. In San Francisco we purchased a small Winnebago Motor home and toured the USA and Canada for twelve months.

I'd entrusted the 164 to a friend to look after for me and when we arrived back in Australia in 1980 I was wondering, after becoming so adept at driving on the right, how I would cope with driving on the left again.

I was soon to find out as my friend had brought the 164 to the airport and I walked out of the terminal, jumped into the Volvo and drove across Melbourne to my father's home in Berwick like I'd never been away.

Reality now became evident; we had no home and no employment. We owned the Volvo and our furniture had been in storage for 16 months. We decided to start again in Queensland and acquired an old caravan and set off. This was my first experience at towing and when I look back on that trip, without the benefit of stabilizer bars etc, I'm surprised we made it without incident.

'Virgil' was our only vehicle (apart from a workman) until 1986 when I saw a Volvo 1800ES for sale in 'Unique Cars'. The car was in Sydney and Margaret and I travelled by bus to Sydney, bought the ES and drove it home. A couple of weeks later John Todhunter called me to say he had heard I'd just bought a Volvo 1800 (some grapevine, I'd not met John) and that a few owners were thinking of forming a Volvo 1800 club and would I be interested. You bet and I became an inaugural member of the Volvo 1800 Club in March 1986.

In 1989 I bought a Red 122s two door and enjoyed owning that as well for about five years. We had now progressed to a three Volvo family.



I bought a small Millard caravan in 1990 and over the next few years we had several caravan trips in Queensland and interstate with the TE and the 122s doing the honours. In 1997 we decided to do the 'big one' and set out for our first 'Around Australia' trip.

Volvos towing vans were a very rare sight and on that trip of 25,000kms we only saw one other, a 240 in the caravan park at Norseman in Western Australia.

I can't say the trip was uneventful as while crossing the Nullarbor the engine began to miss every now and then. "Don't you dare stop out here" I warned Virgil. We camped in the bush that night and the next morning he started easily and we set off again but only managed about one kilometre before he stopped altogether. I correctly diagnosed the problem as a blocked fuel filter possibly from dirty fuel from the day before. A very considerate Road Train driver stopped to see if he could help but to no avail so he radioed ahead for a tow truck.

We were about 80kms east of Norseman and the tow truck soon arrived and he winched the 164 onto the back, hooked the caravan on behind, and we were off. The caravan had never travelled so fast and when I commented that I couldn't see the caravan (because of the folded up ramps) in his side mirror he replied. "You only have to worry if you can see it!"



We spent a couple of nights in Norseman while the local mechanic, who had never worked on a Volvo before, replaced the fuel filter with a BMW job and then tried unsuccessfully to track down why the car was missing.

Still with our 'missing' problem we travelled onto Albany where we had heard there was a Volvo specialist mechanic. He serviced the 164 and tried, also unsuccessfully by replacing several components, to fix the 'missing' problem. The car would miss badly under acceleration but stopped when just cruising.

By the time we reached Perth the situation was quite grim and I took it to Swedish Car Company who spent a couple of days and finally tracked down the problem to the dipstick. Yes, the dipstick! It was loose in its hole in the block and when I accelerated it would swing back allowing the finger loop on the top to short out on the wire on the side of the distributor. It turned out to be quite an expensive dipstick problem.



The 164 now ran sweetly all the way through northern Western Australia and the Northern Territory but when we were about 100kms west of Camooweal there was suddenly a loud banging noise coming from the engine compartment.

Bloody hell, what now! I pulled over to the side and was surprised to hear the engine ticking over sweetly as I'd expected to see a piston hanging out or something else just as drastic. Then I noticed something laying on the road a few hundred metres back and when I went back I saw it was one of the horns off my car. The holding bolt had worked loose and while still attached by the wiring had been bouncing and banging under the car. Phew, what a sigh of relief. We still had one horn so I threw it in the back and refitted it when we arrived home and it is still working to this day.

In 1998, having sold the 122s a few years before, we still owned two Volvos and Margaret (my personal SWMBO) demanded I sell one of the cars as "We don't need two cars". What was I to do? Commonsense told me that if we were to sell one of the Volvos the most practical one to keep would be the 164 so I reluctantly (I still regret it) sold the 1800ES which went back to Sydney.

A week later I found a second hand six cylinder Volvo 960 wagon (one of only 48 sold throughout Australia) and snapped it up.

Margaret's comment: "I thought we were getting back to only one Volvo!" - "We did, but you didn't specify for how long!" (I though I was being very brave.)

The 960 now became our 'first' car and it took over the towing jobs and daily usage while the 164 was retired to just participate in car club outings and special occasions. The speedo has yet to reach 300,000kms and it still looks great every time I take it out. It gets so little use these days I've even thought vaguely about selling it if someone made me a tempting offer.

In 2004 I sold the 960 after 6 years and I now drive a 2004 V70T wagon which is great except I tend to unfavourably compare its woeful turning circle to that of the wonderful old 164.

Kevin Greenaway