

The Weekender ONLY \$3.35 PER WEEK FRIDAY. SATURDAY. SUNDAY CLICK TO ORDER The New York Times

COLLECTING

Vintage Volvos Earn Their Stripes (Ask the General Who Owns One)



Andrew Council for The New York Times

Colin Powell and his 1966 Volvo 122S wagon.

By JIM MOTAVALLI Published: March 4, 2007

PHIL SINGHER became passionate about old Volvos in a rather roundabout way.

Related

Rust in Peace: When Volvo Took a Bit Off the Top (March 4, 2007)

Enlarge This Image



The Volvo PV445.

Enlarge This Image



The Volvo P1900 convertible.

Enlarge This Image

"I married into a very clapped-out 1966 Volvo 122S sedan," said Mr. Singher, 54, who now fixes these cars for a living on Whidbey Island, Wash. "I learned to work on the Volvo out of necessity, but the more I fixed it the better I liked it. My wife's car was amazingly tough and absolutely reliable. And it was designed to be easy to fix."

Let's face it, with a reputation as reliable transportation for safety-minded drivers, Volvos weren't all that hip in the 1960s. Nobody stuck big yellow flower decals on them. But as baby boomers morphed into responsible homeowners, those boxy Volvos started to look better and better. Their longevity added to the cachet. The company created a High Mileage Club for cars that had traveled more than 100,000 miles, and owners attached the club's emblems to their cars as a badge of honor.

Mr. Singher has the emblem for his 122S, which has been fully restored. He has also restored a 1967 1800S. The 1800 was Volvo's period sports car, best known for its

- SIGN IN TO E-MAIL OR SAVE THIS PRINT REPRINTS SHARE

ARTICLE TOOLS SPONSORED BY (500) DAYS OF SUMMER

More Articles in Automobiles >

TicketWatch - Theater Offers by E-Mail

Sign up for ticket offers from Broadway shows and other advertisers. See Sample | Privacy Policy Sign Up

AT&T U-verse TV DVR included on select plans. UNDER \$50.00 /mo LEARN MORE > GEOGRAPHIC RESTRICTIONS APPLY at&t Advertise on NYTimes.com



The Volvo 1800ES station wagon.

dramatic fins and the fact that “The Saint” (played by Roger Moore) drove one on television.

Another Volvo fan is [Colin L. Powell](#). The former secretary of state and chairman of the [Joint Chiefs of Staff](#) was often found behind the chairman’s quarters at Fort Myer in Virginia tinkering with his cars.

“At one time I had six, stashed at various places around the post so the M.P.’s wouldn’t find them all,” he said in a recent interview. “My usual pattern was to fix them mechanically and then do enough body work to get them through a quick Earl Scheib paint job.

“My cars wouldn’t pass anyone’s magnet test,” he said, referring to how cars are checked for body filler that disguises rust damage, and added, “It’s been great fun and I’ve met a lot of interesting people.”

Mr. Powell’s current pride and joy is a 1966 122S wagon, a car similar to the barely ambulatory wreck that [Bill Clinton](#) and [Al Gore](#) presented to him at a reception when he retired as chairman of the Joint Chiefs in 1993. “I tried to express my profound gratitude,” Mr. Powell said.

There’s no question that the Volvos of the 1960s — the humpbacked 544; the rounded 122S, often mistaken for a car a decade older; and the curvy 1800, Sweden’s answer to the popular British sports cars of the time — are treasured by many people today.

Supported by an extensive parts network in the United States and Sweden, the cars are more likely to see regular use than just being presented at car shows. They are relatively fuel-efficient, comfortable at highway speeds, relatively safe (Volvo pioneered the three-point seat belt) and not difficult or expensive to maintain.

Detroit design also influenced the 444, which was the first Volvo sized and built with an eye to the export market. Both the 444, which came to the United States for the 1956 model year, and the much-improved 544, which came along in 1959, bore a strong resemblance to the 1941 Ford. And Americans actually started buying them.

Volvo chronology is a little unusual. The updated but still antique-looking 544 was introduced after the 122S, which was much more modern; the Volvo Amazon, which became the 122S in this country, had already begun production in 1956. And the 122S continued for several years after its replacement, the 140 series, was in showrooms.

It was the handsome, if somewhat stylistically dated 122S, that really established Volvo’s name in this country. The four-cylinder 122S, sold in two- and four-door versions as well as a useful station wagon, soon earned a reputation for reliability. The atypical 1800 sports car, with racy styling and tailfins, was introduced in 1961. It was pricey for its time — about \$4,000 in 1967.

Volvos were popularly believed to be for pipe-smoking liberal college professors. In a 1985 Doonesbury cartoon, Duke asks Honey how she knows that a potential organ donor for him is a liberal. “They pulled him from a Volvo,” Honey says.

Bruce Potter, president of Volvo Sports America, a club originally set up to cater to 1800 owners, said he did not buy the liberal tag. “Volvos then were for people who didn’t want to make car payments for the rest of their lives. Volvo said it best in one of the old ads — the cars offered the best bang for the buck. They publicized the fact that the average Volvo lived 17 years in Sweden.”

Mr. Potter, a laboratory equipment salesman in Basking Ridge, N.J., owns a 1973 1800ES, the distinctive wagon version of the 1800. Only 8,078 1800ES models were made in 1971-73. Mr. Potter said the price of a fully restored 444, 544 or 122S ranged from \$5,000 to \$10,000; an 1800 from \$10,000 to \$25,000; and an 1800ES up to

Collectible Cars Share and View Photo Gallery

SEARCH THE GALLERY BY:

Type	Make
Decade	Enter Keyword <input type="button" value="Go"/>

[View All »](#)

[Advanced Search »](#)

FEATURED CAR ?



Citroën DS 21 Pallas, All Other Countries
In this car the hydraulic system not only operates t...
[Read More »](#)

MOST POPULAR CARS ?



1966 Corvette

1972 DS21

1967 Minor

[Display Your Own Collectible Car! »](#)



2008 Collectible Car of the Year Contest

The votes are in! Check out this year's [Collectible Car of the Year](#).

1960-65 PORSCHE 356B&C BUYER'S GUIDE

This unique series of downloadable, on-demand 24-page-plus packets on popular collector cars, is a comprehensive guide that covers everything a reader would want to know about his or her favorite classic car.



[Preview This Buyer's Guide](#)

MOST POPULAR

E-MAILED BLOGGED SEARCHED

1. [Frugal Traveler: Staying in Touch Internationally, on the Cheap](#)
2. [Op-Ed Contributor: Dear A.I.G., I Quit!](#)
3. [Nicholas D. Kristof: Learning How to Think](#)
4. [Magazine Preview: The Civil Heretic](#)
5. [Online Age Quiz Is a Window for Drug Makers](#)
6. [Cities Deal With a Surge in Shantytowns](#)
7. [An Orderly Office? That's Personal](#)
8. [Study Links Depression to Thinning of Brain's Cortex](#)
9. [Drinkers' Red Face May Signal Cancer Risk](#)
10. [Could It Really Be Him? Yeah, Probably](#)

[Go to Complete List »](#)

\$40,000.

"The loyalty toward these older models is just unbelievable," said Gretchen Adams of Afton, N. Y., who is vice president of the Volvo Club of America. Ms. Adams's favorite old Volvo was a rare 445, the delivery/station wagon version of the 444. Other rare models include the fiberglass-bodied 1900 convertible (only 67 produced) and the 123GT, a go-fast version of the 122 introduced in 1967. Fully restored, it would be worth \$15,000, Mr. Potter said.

Irvin Gordon of Long Island bought a 1966 1800S coupe and still owns it, having chalked up more than 2.5 million miles and earned a place in the Guinness Book of World Records for owning the world's most traveled automobile. "If I didn't maintain the car it would fall apart," said Mr. Gordon, 67. "As it is, I think the Volvo will outlast me."

Volvo has a good record of support for its vintage models. "There is a lot of pride involved with most of our old cars," said Claes Rydholm, Volvo's designated older model expert in Sweden.

Finding parts is not a big problem. Genuine Classic Parts, a Swedish company, sells them through Volvo dealers. Another Swedish company, VP Auto Parts, also has a large selection. And, of course, there are still many parts cars available.

That's how Mr. Powell got many of his parts. "I would strip them and stack the parts," he said. "A lot of people heard I was doing that. Word got around among Volvo aficionados: 'If you want a starter, see General Powell.'"

[More Articles in Automobiles »](#)

Ads by Google

what's this?

[The New 2010 Lexus ISC](#)

Explore and Compare the Features of the Brand New Lexus Convertible.
www.Lexus.com/RX

[Volvo - Official Site](#)

Compare, Build & Price Your Next Volvo at the Official Volvo Site.
www.VolvoCars.com/us

[Lemon Law -- Volvo Recall](#)

Is your Volvo car or SUV a Lemon? Get Free Lemon Law Help Today!
www.volvo-lemon-law.com

Tips

To find reference information about the words used in this article, double-click on any word, phrase or name. A new window will open with a dictionary definition or encyclopedia entry.

Past Coverage

[Land Rover's Tadpole Turns Into a Prince](#) (April 22, 2007)
[DESIGN; Mazda and Volvo Try On New Genes](#) (March 11, 2007)
[COLLECTING; Vintage Volvos Earn Their Stripes \(Ask the General Who Owns One\)](#) (March 4, 2007)
[RUST IN PEACE; When Volvo Took A Bit Off the Top](#) (March 4, 2007)

Related Searches

[Automobiles](#)
[Volvo Car Corp](#)
[Powell, Colin L](#)
[Collectors and Collections](#)

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM



nytimes.com/theater

THEATER



Natasha Richardson's life and career

Also in Theater:

[Natasha Richardson and the Redgrave dynasty](#)

[Slide show: Natasha Richardson's career](#)

[Slide show: scenes from "A Streetcar Named Desire"](#)

ADVERTISEMENTS

Get Times Reader Free. A Digital Newspaper That Reads Like The Real Thing.

Other papers leave you out of the conversation. Get The Weekender.



The New York Times STORE



Four Mail Trucks in Milwaukee æ" Circa 1910

[Buy Now](#)

HOME & GARDEN »



Hands-On History Lessons

FASHION & STYLE »



The Obamas Get Up Close and Personal in D.C.

OPINION »

Schott's Vocab

A new blog about the words and phrases that encapsulate the times in which we live.

U.S. »



Cities Deal With a Surge in Shanty Towns

OPINION »



Op-Ed: Madagascar, an Island of Instability

ART & DESIGN »



New Admiration for an Old Foe in London

[Home](#) | [World](#) | [U.S.](#) | [N.Y./Region](#) | [Business](#) | [Technology](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Arts](#) | [Style](#) | [Travel](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Automobiles](#) | [Back to Top](#)

[Copyright 2007 The New York Times Company](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)