

“Is This Volvo Heaven or What?”

By: Larry Bachus

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I'm in heavy city traffic at a six-lane intersection waiting on the light to change. I look to the left and see three 700's, two sedans and a wagon, in a row. Immediately behind these three Volvos are two Japanese cars, followed by a 940. In front of me is a Ford, and in front of the Ford is a 745 Turbo. I'm in my 240, a 1987 with 114,000 miles. Two cars behind me are an 850 GLT and three cars behind the 850 are a 780 CPE.

Beyond my right fender is a 164 with a busted taillight and in my right rearview mirror is a rusted, faded 140 with a bent antenna. Did I go through some kind of time/space warp and land myself in Stockholm? Can't be because it's December and my a/c is blowing on high.

The light changes to green and my foot goes to the gas...and then a split second knee jerk reaction plants my foot securely back onto the brake. Seems the Ford has stalled. And now I'm stuck too close to swing around him. A Pontiac behind me is now on my tail. To the left and right, traffic begins straining forward like a slow freight train coupled with rubber bands. The cars behind me have resorted to conversation. Conversation?

Oh, yes, cars CAN talk with their HORNS. It's like dog barking language. We, as humans can't understand it, but we must assume the dogs can comprehend it, because they all react. Now imagine yourself in my circumstances, and you'll see that you, too, can understand the "hornese", in an amazingly short time. For example, "beep-beep-beep!" means, "Hey, buddy, pay attention!" And "BEEEEEEEP!" means, "The light turned green 10 seconds ago!"

And then there's "BEEEEEEEE-MOVE-IT-ASSHOLE-EEEEEP!"...which is self-explanatory.

For a brief period, I contemplated joining the conversation, but decided to look for a way out of the whole situation. While waiting and watching for my opening, I'm surprised to see the 900's, 700's, and 200's are all over the place! About three cars out of every 10 are Volvos passing me. If I'm not in Stockholm, maybe I've been magically transported and dumped into the erotic fantasy zone of some Volvo salesman who went to bed after an espresso-kahlua nightcap. NOT!

I leave the heavy city traffic behind to take the expressway to my neighborhood. Now, my 240 has a strong engine but not the best acceleration. In the rearview mirror I see a rather impatient 850 approaching me on the on-ramp. Well, impatient is not the best verb. It's like URGENT-EMERGENCY...like the driver had eaten black beans and broccoli with prune juice for lunch, and just heard on the radio about a toilet paper shortage.

So this 850 LEAPS over me on the on-ramp, and over three more lanes of traffic to land into the passing lane and disappears into the horizon. I merge and settle into one of the middle lanes... befitting my 240-DL. To my left, a string of Turbo 700's, 900's and 800's pass at 75-80 mph. Obviously they'd all heard of the TP shortage. I'm doing 62-65 mph and trying to look inconspicuous. The signs say 55 mph limit, but there's no highway patrol and the pavement is full of CRATERS. This place gets federal funds, but the money must not be arriving to the highway maintenance or enforcement divisions. This is certainly a place to drive with strong suspensions and strong engines. The only cars going 55 mph are in the slow lanes (and some are Volvos). PV-444's, 544's, 122's and 140's are interspersed with Yugos, Ladas, Beatles and other smokers and clunkers.



Yet still, here on the expressway, away from the skyscrapers, 10-15% of all cars on the road are Volvos. And then, I pass a pharmaceutical manufacturer just off the expressway. The administration parking area is ALL VOLVOS. The salesmen, executives, and managers ALL have 240's or 740's. Is this *Volvo heaven or what?*

Well, in a way it is — all these Volvos are thriving in Puerto Rico. Most visitors to PR must think that the locals like to drive new cars. The people of Puerto Rico must drive new cars because the potholes, tropical heat, high humidity and salt spray take their daily toll on the life of cars here, which usually return to the environment by their 10th birthday. Most 15-year old Volvos, however, are still on daily duty, delivering kids, groceries. Etc.

Passenger Safety...the reality of driving a car in PR doesn't necessarily coincide with traffic laws or the questions on the driver's license exam about right-of-way, speed limits, or exactly how many lanes of traffic can squeeze onto a two-lane road. My auto

insurance agent says the rates are about six times the rates in the U-S because people here have a different perception of time and space. Time...as in how much time is required to go from point "A" to "B" in city traffic. Space...like how much space is enough between two cars traveling at 60 mph. As a "gringo", I can say that driving in San Juan is something akin to "bumper-cars" at the amusement park. And every time I buckle-up, I'm glad I'm behind the wheel of my sturdy, boxy, Volvo. Mind you...I'm not criticizing. I'm just as guilty. You know what they say, "When In Rome..." and in six years of driving here, I've not had a wreck yet!

Puerto Rico is just plain saturated with Volvos. Only in Scandinavia do you see more Volvos on the streets than in PR. Volvos are around 80% of all European car sales in PR each year. When you tie these figures to the fact that Volvos don't change body styles frequently, and the reliability of the brand, it seems that Volvos are everywhere in PR, especially 240's and 740's. If you stood on any street corner in San Juan and watched 100 cars go by, you'd see 15-20% Volvos. Remember that PR roads and the salt spray from the ocean can turn most cars into rusted junk in 5-10 years, but the boxy, rugged, tank-like Volvos just keep on...

After you purchase a Volvo in PR. you'll get a magazine subscription published by Trebol Motors called "La Era de Volvo" or "The Volvo Era". The magazine has maintenance tips and features specials on parts and accessories. The magazine has a circulation of 13,000. Trebol puts a front license plate on all their cars that says **"Volvo, calidad que no se discute"**. This translates to "Volvo, quality that cannot be disputed." Is this Volvo heaven, or what?

LARRY BACHUS,

About the Author...Larry Bachus owns three Volvos and is a member of VSA and VCOA. He owns a 71-1800-E with 231,000 miles on it, an award winner; an '86 740 Turbo with 38,000 miles (almost new); and an '87 240-DL with 114,000 miles.

Larry lives in Venezuela, Puerto Rico and the U-S. He troubleshoots and repairs problems with industrial pumps in the Caribbean Islands and parts of South America. (Tough job, but someone's gotta do it!)



Update in 2005: Larry moved to Nashville, Tennessee in 1997 to write a book, work on his inventions, and launch his pump consulting business. He sold the '87 240 Volvo as he left Puerto Rico. The P-1800 is still in pristine condition approaching 250-k miles and the 740 sedan is approaching 130-k miles.