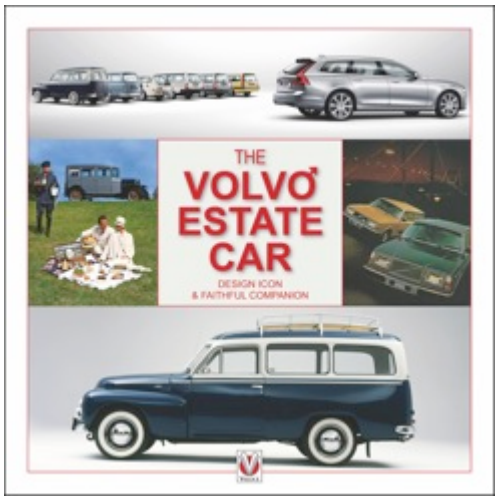
Book Review – The Volvo estate car: Design icon and faithful companion

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Title: The Volvo estate car: Design icon and faithful companion

Author: Ashley Hollebone

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Kieron Fennelly investigates a new book about the oh-so-solid and wonderfully spacious Volvo estate cars…

To devote a book to a car that was neither a style icon nor had any sporting pretensions is an original idea, and author Ashley Hollebone pulls it off, entertainingly demonstrating how the Volvo estate worked its way into so many owners' affections. Of course the star is the 240 of which almost 2.9 million (including saloons) were built over 20 years, a car so popular that Volvo shelved its initial plans to drop it and for a decade it was manufactured alongside its nominal successors, the 700-900 series. The author brings the story up to date with the current XC90 and V90 models, but he is on slightly weaker ground here as inevitably these cars are more difficult to distinguish from their competitors.

Yet rather than analyse how through two changes of ownership Volvo has sought to retain its individuality, he simply describes the cars, his text at times reflecting rather too closely Volvo's own promotional literature. It might have been more effective to quote motoring journals and road tests occasionally rather than simply regaling the reader with the biased view of a marque advocate.

Production figures for each model are usefully quoted, but otherwise the lack of technical detail will disappoint some readers: there are no cutaways or specifications, one limp reference to a 'new, low friction engine,' not otherwise explained and on page 77, photographs of four power units are simply captioned 'engine range.' Later the author mentions a 'new' V8 developed by Yamaha *of all people:* An odd comment which should have been removed by the closer editing which would also have rationalised the description of the 760, which we are told three times in two pages, was 'radically different.' Although Hollebone does comment interestingly, if briefly, on aspects of platform sharing under Ford, he does not say why Volvo put its car division up for sale in the first place, or indeed hint at what present owner Geely's ambitions might be.

VERDICT

The work is very well illustrated, making imaginative use of the company's PR archive and

Hollebone’s upbeat, conversational style makes it an easy read, but the Volvo Estate is more of a coffee table book than a work of reference.