

Holy Conestoga, Sven, It's... BOSS WAGON III!

Our only problem will be bears in the air.

BY MICHAEL JORDAN



• Station wagons are pretty nice items to have around. Americans have always followed the road to its vanishing point, but from the Conestoga to the moon buggy the idea has always been to be prepared for anything once you get there. If you can throw it all into the back of a fast car, so much the better. The station wagon is an obvious solution to this simple problem. It's capable of carting test equipment, pulling a trailer of motorcycles or functioning as New York's finest cut-and-thrust airport limousine.

To a magazine that gets into as many different kinds of trouble as this one, it's always been important to have the best multi-purpose vehicle available. That was how the first Boss Wagon was invented in 1966. It was a Plymouth Fury Wagon the size of a pocket battleship. Thanks to a shrewd bout with the option sheet, it actually went around corners and had a 383-cubic inch engine stronger than hog's breath. Two years later, Cousin of Boss Wagon rolled into the Red Ball Garage—

an Oldsmobile Vista-Cruiser 455 injected with every performance option that the muscle-car era had to offer. In the age of brawny cars, a 120-mph station wagon made perfect sense.

Later, of course, vans and trucks became the performance freak's station wagon surrogates. But recently the times have come around again to fast wagons. Even Mercedes-Benz has built one.

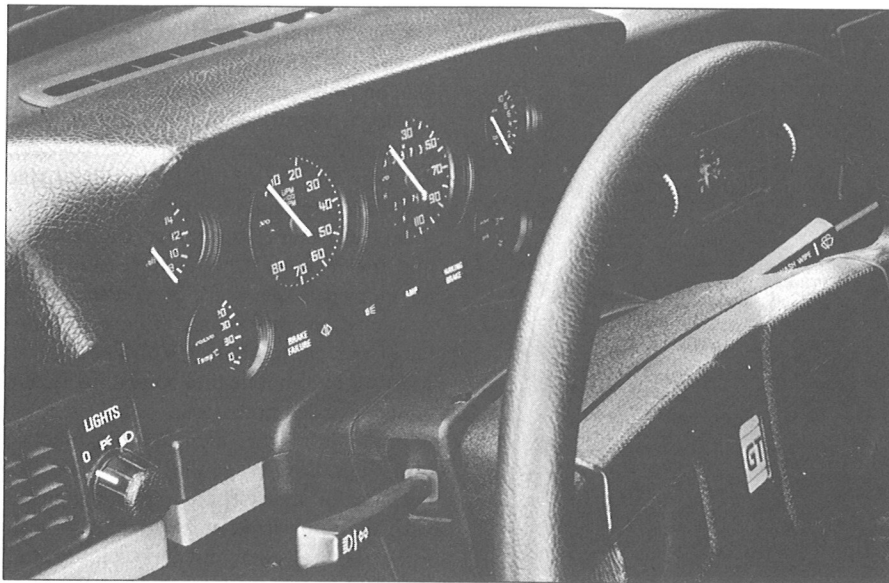
So when the time came to order another magazine command module, we figured the world was ready for another bucks-up station wagon. These days Volvo wagons are as trendy as the 1940 Ford woody, so we decided to feed our station wagon fantasies with a Volvo too. We arranged for Volvo to send off an appliance-white 265 DL to Tom Castellano of Castell Enterprises to be reborn.

When Boss Wagon III jumps into your rear-view mirror, you'll know it. The paint scheme of Cadillac gray and Porsche anniversary silver seems to lower the car right onto the ground. The car looks serious,

and the application of Kal-Gard, a flat-black baked-on paint, to all the chrome surfaces lends BW3 the mean look of a missile cruiser. The intricate fiberglass chin spoiler was taken from a three-piece mold fabricated by Dave Kent—the man responsible for actually painting the car—and Castellano. The car's front end and rectangular headlights duplicate Volvo's new look for 1978. The wheels are taken directly from the Volvo 242 GT but they owe their impact to paint and polish.

The interior of the new Boss Wagon follows through with the black-out treatment. It's got more black carpet than the boogie van of the kid next door. Even the hide-away compartment is carpeted. Black vinyl has been hand-fitted to the headliner. Warren Morimoto kept to the 242 GT treatment while re-upholstering the seats in black corduroy, but the side bolsters of the stock nine-way adjustable buckets have been built-up to provide firm support.

The control layout features the thirteen-inch steering wheel from the GT and the



In the wheelhouse: Volvo's sport instrumentation relays messages from the engine room.



It's a lot more than flashy paint that makes BW3 look fast, it's also a lower ride height.



A space a pack-rat could love: The Volvo 265 wagon affords a refrigerator-size cargo area.

sports instrumentation from the catalog of Volvo's competition parts service. The simple yellow numerals against the black background of the dials lend a cool feeling of purpose to the wheelhouse. The instruments supply readouts for mph, rpm, fuel level, oil pressure, amperage and water temperature. The twin outside mirrors are electrically operated by two controls located between the seats. To keep the helmsman apprised of changing road conditions, Volvo's combination AM/FM-CB radio has been installed.

Of course, all this flash is just for spectators. All the really savory modifications are underneath. First, the bulbous twin wells aft of the rear wheels have been slashed off and the full-size spare tire discarded in favor of a space-saver model. To improve weight distribution, the battery has been relocated behind the right rear wheel next to the windshield washer reservoir. The stock Volvo wagon already has four-wheel disc brakes, but Castellano ordered them drilled to reduce fade and improve heat dissipation. The stock brake pads are retained.

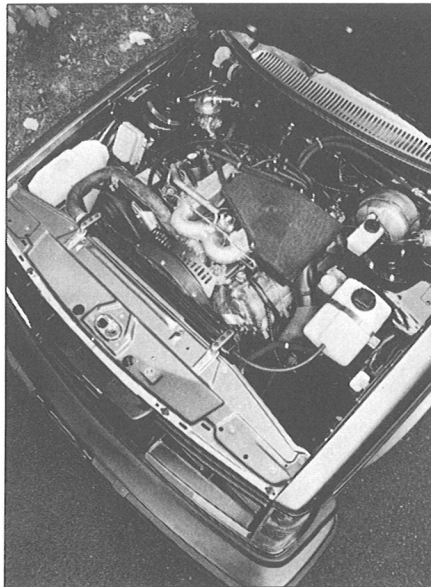
Virtually all of the vital suspension bits come right out of Volvo's competition catalog. De Carbon gas-pressurized shock absorbers are installed at each wheel. The heavy-duty front springs from the 264 sedan are cut down three quarters of a coil. The rear rally springs have had a coil and a half clipped from them. Overall, spring rates have been stiffened by twenty percent and the ride height has been lowered three quarters of an inch. In addition, harder bushings are employed to locate the rear Panhard rod and front lower control arms. A 25mm front anti-sway bar replaces the nineteen-millimeter stock bar, and a 21mm rear anti-sway bar is fitted to the vacant space beneath the stock wagon. The only specially built suspension components are two tiny brackets that locate the bottom of the front MacPherson struts, permitting two degrees of caster to be dialed into the alignment for a positive self-centering feel to the steering.

Out on the road, Boss Wagon III lives up to its illustrious heritage. Its new-found balance eliminates much of the understeer endemic to station wagons and transforms a 104-inch wheelbase box into a steel blade ready for cut-and-thrust. The slalom test proved it: While a bog-standard 265 could only manage 52.4 mph through the 600-foot course, BW3 did consistent 56s and even blitzed through once at 57.6 mph. And what the slalom didn't reveal, the skid-pad did. The stocker jounced around like an ungainly cart at 0.68 g, lifting its

inside rear wheel clear off the pavement. Meanwhile Boss Wagon settled into a nice, power-limited understeer groove and clicked off 0.72 g laps time after time, its Pirelli CN-36 tires hardly even warmed by the whole thing.

On the highway, the performance suspension is equally impressive. BW3 is no more sensitive to pavement imperfections than the stocker and despite a little tire harshness affords purely gentlemanly comfort. At speed, our new gunship feels perfectly predictable. Lean on the controls, and BW3 will gladly do your bidding, never fighting back. Under fierce braking, the drilled discs whine just like race-car brakes but they do the job of halting more than 3000 pounds of speeding station wagon. On the whole, Boss Wagon III is perfectly amenable to joy-riding over the narrow service roads of Bear Mountain State Park or to flat-out freeway cruising with the stereo rattling the windows. When we specified a gentleman's express in the initial discussions about this vehicle, Volvo and Tom Castellano took us at our word. BW3 comes awfully close to fulfilling all of our secret fantasies of luxurious and expeditious transport from one place to another.

One problem does rear its ugly head



*Our gentleman's express
is undernourished,
but you'll need a heavy
foot to catch us.*

though. BW3's 125-hp overhead-cam V-6 is *slow*. It simply wasn't designed by the safety- and reliability-conscious Swedes to haul around a ton-and-a-half wagon at hyper-legal speeds with any kind of *élan*. Utilitarian go-power is about the most you can hope for. So despite the excellent ride and handling, superb finish and appointments and marvelous space efficiency of our Boss Wagon, it needs more calories. A lot more calories. And, as you may have suspected, they're coming in the next chapter of our conversion of Volvo's dull-but-practical automobile into something with a bunch of speed potential.

In the meantime, Tom Castellano got so crazy with Boss Wagon III that he's building one for himself. If you find yourself with the same irrational desire to go fast, feel good, look great and carry a lot of stuff in a Volvo, talk to him at: Castell Enterprises, 4943 McConnell Ave., Los Angeles, Calif. 90066. Telephone: (213) 822-7130.

You might not get him right away, though. Like us, he may be out there finding out that a Volvo station wagon, like the *Millenium Falcon*, can do a lot more tricks than the competition imagines.

But then, what does Darth Vader know, anyway? ●

HUMPHREY SUTTON

