



Saab 9-5

Featured model: 2.0t Saloon



E NTER THE OLD AND NEW 9-5s IN a spot-the-difference competition and most people would be lucky to detect a handful of changes, let alone the 1265 that Saab claims. Anoraks will observe that a mildly modified nose gives the game away, but it's under the skin where most of the subtle reworking has taken place.

There are three revised trim and equipment levels, with the 155mph Aero remaining as the ultimate performance derivative. All models, Saab says, benefit from improved mpg, reduced emissions and lower tax bands. And for the first time in a 9-5, a diesel is on offer. It's a smooth and civilised 24-valve V6 TiD developing 258 lb ft of torque. Though hushed and refined at speed, it's not the quietest of derv-burners when accelerating from rest, but 176bhp gives it swift performance.

As far as the petrol power units go, we were more than happy with the turbo two-litre which is a lively engine kept smooth by balancer shafts and relaxed by a long-legged fifth gear within the slick-shifting gearbox. Two-pedal devotees can opt for the all-new, smoothly operating five-speed automatic transmission.

Revisions to the suspension, steering and tyres, to make the 9-5 more akin to the sporty Aero (without introducing any of the earlier Viggen's alarming torque steer), have been successful. Although the set-up is firmer, the former rear-end float has been quelled and yet, cleverly, ride comfort hasn't been compromised. However, the heavier V6 diesel doesn't have quite the alertness and nimble feel of

the two-litre, and we wish that the steering were not so light.

The interior remains substantially unchanged and continues to provide excellent comfort, particularly for taller drivers. Clear vision and ergonomic controls are complemented by Saab's discrete features, such as "night panel" instruments (the auxiliary dials are illuminated only on a "need-to-know" basis), and joystick ventilator controls for the climate control system.

Accommodation is considerate to all occupants; indeed, the space and comfort afforded by the back seat are exemplary. There's a generous list of standard and optional equipment, while in addition, improvements have been made to the model's already comprehensive safety features.

Despite a 12cm sill, the spacious, well-lined boot isn't difficult to load and the back seats can be folded for additional luggage room.

VERDICT

The 9-5 faces considerable competition in the larger executive class from the best in the business, but it acquits itself very well. Although it's no BMW 5-Series, these latest improvements have made the already impressive 9-5 all the more rewarding to drive. And the nice thing is that even the well-priced entry level (Linear) two-litre doesn't leave you feeling short-changed.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★★○
Comfort	★★★★○
Space/practicality	★★★★○

THE 9-5 RANGE

size and type large executive (premium priced) saloon and estate

trim levels Linear, Arc, Vector, Aero

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/2.0litre/150bhp, 4/2.3/185, 4/2.3 HOT/250, V6/3.0/200; diesel: V6/3.0/176, 4/2.2/125 available spring 2002

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; 5-speed stepped automatic (with torque converter) optional

notable features active head restraints, night instrument panel, automatic climate control. Options: bi-xenon headlamps, heated front and rear seats, load compensating suspension (estate)

BRIEF SPECIFICATION

engine 1985cc, petrol, 16 valves 150bhp/177 lb ft with light-pressure turbo and balancer shafts; 70-litre fuel tank

drive 5-speed manual (3-mode, 5-speed automatic optional), front-wheel drive

suspension front: MacPherson coil spring/damper struts, anti-roll bar
Rear: multi-link with coil spring/damper struts, anti-roll bar

tyres 215/55R16V on 6½in alloy wheels

brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with ABS and brake force distribution controls

0-60mph* 8.0sec

max speed* 134mph *maker's figures

official (combined) mpg 33.2

LIKES ...

double sun visors
rear headrests fold out of the way
elegant front drinks holder
neat screen clip for parking tickets

and GRIPES

some fittings cheap and plasticky
less thigh support as seat is raised
underseat wiring mars rear footspace
temporary spare wheel