

# Volvo Trucks in Australia

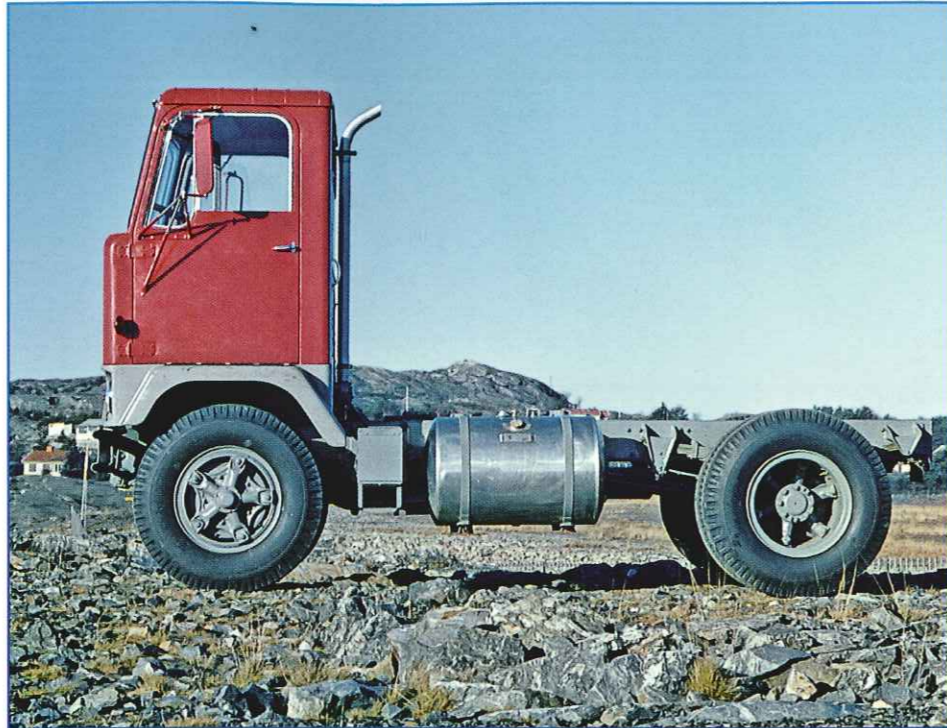
by Steven King

## An occasional series covering the early years - Part 1, Volvo F88

Although Volvo cars had been introduced many years before, it was not until 1967 that Max Winkless, at that time the principal of Swedish Motors in Wollongong, NSW, and previously involved with Antill Ranger, imported three F86 prime movers. Two of these were put into service with Mayne Nickless on interstate trips, where they proved to be unbreakable. Indeed, one was still in service ten years later, with 1.6 million kilometres on the clock. When compared with other trucks on the road at the time, and in spite of having an engine capacity of only 6.8 litres, they made a big impression. Although it was the smaller F86 that led the Viking invasion to our shores, it was the F88, introduced a year later, that stamped Volvo's permanency here.

### Volvo F88 Genesis

Volvo had been developing turbo-charged diesel motors from the early 1950's and, by 1959, had achieved reliability with this technology. A push into the North American market at that time, using the bonneted L495 Titan model with the TD96 185hp motor, turned out to be a dismal failure due to misreading the market; petrol was cheap, turbo-charging was not trusted, and local regulations demanded a short 'bumper to back of cab' dimension. This failure prompted the creation of a project team to develop a model aimed at the American market.



The prototypes of project 2859, in day and sleeper cab versions, underwent extensive trials in America before being returned to Sweden. Photos: Volvo Archives

In the mid Sixties, Volvo catered for a wide range of transport needs, but it was only the F86 and F88 models that were targeted for overseas markets. Image: Steven King Collection



1. Volvo F 88
2. Volvo F 85
3. Volvo N 88
4. Volvo F 86
5. Volvo F 83
6. Volvo N 86
7. Volvo N 84
8. Volvo F 82

Concurrent with project 2859, Volvo were modernising their entire range, designated by 'system 8'. The '8' concept was derived from the fact that the eight main components: engine; gearbox; drive line; frame; steering; brakes; suspension; and cab, were involved in the renewal program. Thus, in 1965, the F88 was born, using the TipTop cab from the Titan, which was virtually unchanged. Elsewhere though, the model consisted of entirely new components which were all manufactured inhouse. Being a clean sheet design, SAE fasteners were used to better suit the American market but, ironically, the F88 was diverted to other markets and very few went to the USA.

The all-new F88 came with a 9.6 litre turbo-charged motor of 260hp and 694 ft/lb of torque along with an eight speed range change synchromesh gearbox. Initial imports were of 4x2 and 6x2 formats, the latter using Volvo's unique bogie layout, favoured in Scandinavia. Standard features, which many other trucks of the time did not have, included: differential lock, full heating/demisting, sprung cab, seat suspension, power steering and double reduction differential, not to mention



The initial outcome of the project was the Titan TipTop, a play on words for the then, innovative tilting cab. It came in 4x2 and 6x2 versions and, except for the cab, used existing Titan components. By this time, the TD96 motor was developing 230hp. Photo: Steven King Collection

the crash resistant sleeper cab.

Max Winkless was well aware that the Australian market would demand a 6x4 bogie, so with the influence of his previous involvement with Mack trucks, he offered a camel-back design, which was to become Volvo's successful 'T ride' bogie for heavy duty operations. Other design influences, said to come from Australia, were the addition of a splitter to the gearbox, making 16 speeds and, of course, the G88 version with its set forward front axle, to meet bridge formula regulations.

Initial imports arrived fully assembled but subsequent stock was completely knocked down and assembled in the Swedish Motors workshop. Australian components, such as spoked wheels, started to creep into the specification.

In 1969, 96 trucks were sold, as well as over 600 cars, which prompted the formation of Volvo Australia Pty Ltd, with AB Volvo buying the majority of Swedish Motors' shares. As an indication of the rate of progress, 200 trucks were sold the following year, and two years later, in 1972, 487 trucks were sold.

### The last F88?

No build records have been found of the Volvo trucks from this era, so it is not known when imports of the F88 stopped; it is thought to coincide with the commencement of the G88 production line in 1972, at the new facility at Wacol, a suburb in Brisbane, Qld.

### The 'UK Type' F88 or '290'

While the F88 was successful in Australia, it was even more so in the United Kingdom. They were used to the 150hp powered Gardner, but became satisfied with the power of the TD100A motor, rated at (UK) 240hp, though before long, other forces were at play. The European Common Market had opened up in the early 1970's; cross channel traffic was developing fast and German regulations required a horse power per ton rating which the F88 didn't meet. This led to other European manufacturers getting into a power race. The 12 litre 330hp TD120 engine design was fully proved and waiting in the wings by this time and was the heart of the new F89 model, introduced in 1970. Volvo claimed that the larger motor under the F88 cab prevented a right hand drive arrangement, conveniently ignoring the contradiction

that the Aussies were building a right hand drive G89.

In order to avoid a loss of market share in the UK until the F12 came into production, the TD100A motor was further developed to (British) 290hp or 300hp SAE and designated TD100B. The major changes were a lower compression ratio, higher turbo pressure, and longer valve overlap, as well as changes to injector settings. To assist starting with the lower compression, a heater element was incorporated into the intake manifold.

With this motor, Volvo introduced the F88 290 in 1975 and, although it did not have the sheer grunt of the F89, it was not far behind, and with the standard 16 speed box, was ultimately faster at the top end. However, there proved to be reliability problems, which were eventually resolved before the end of its two year production run.

Back in Australia, Volvo truck sales were going so well that the Wacol plant could not meet the demand; 50 of the F88 290's were imported in the 1975/76 period, fully built, from Sweden. Although the chassis numbers are known, there are no surviving records of delivery dates. The specification included spring brakes on all wheels and a load sensor on the rear axle, which didn't conform to Australian rules at the time, and were removed. These models are ▶

A very early (note the metal cab handles) F88 restored by Volvo apprentices and now on display at the Road Transport Hall of Fame, Alice Springs. Photo: Gary Richards Collection



Continued ...

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identified by having a full width plastic grille, disc wheels, wipers below the screen, and a flat air intake snorkel.

Operators in Australia were very impressed with the speed, handling and ride, although one owner reported that it was never the same truck after the first service. It would seem that the engine installed in the Australian imports is something of an enigma, as it does not fully meet the specification of the TD100B. In fact, my engine, and others, are TD100BD, which apparently is an interim specification.

I am hoping that readers might have further information on these, and I would be delighted to hear from them. \*Steven King. Email: avthg@hunteroldtrucks.com

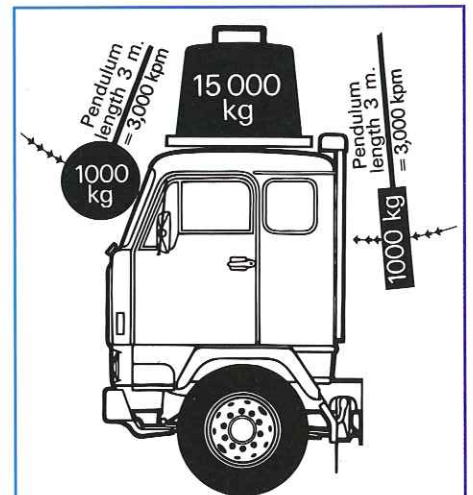
## An occasional series covering the early years - Part 1



The author's F88 290 in its heyday, during the late 1970's.  
Photo: Ron Cameron



Currently undergoing a 'ground up' restoration. This shot shows how the F and G versions can be accommodated by fitting the mudguards in a different position.  
Photo: Steven King Collection



Volvo's driver protection standards were decades ahead of British competition.  
Image: Steven King Collection



Now a yard tug, Forrest Transport once operated this F88 290 4x2 on road trains in the Northern Territory. An inspection of the vehicle revealed that its original cab has been replaced with another 290 cab.  
Photo: Gary Richards Collection

### Sources

*Volvo F88 & F89 at Work* by Patrick Dyer; *Volvo Down Under* by Pedr Davis; *Seventy Years of Volvo Trucks* by Christer Olsson

