



Information

Retrospective:

How A Star Was Born

With its unique Canopy Top roof and 'surround glass' cabin, the Saab 9-X Air promises to become a landmark in open-top car design, just like the first Saab Convertible, which surprised the automotive world when it was revealed exactly 25 years ago at the 1983 International Frankfurt Motor Show.

A quarter of a century ago, four seater convertibles were a rare sight on the road and largely considered to be 'second' cars, best kept in the garage for fair weather conditions. The soft-top car from Scandinavia was to change that perception. It was designed as a practical, four season, four seater car for use all the year round.

Like the 9-X Air, the first Convertible was unveiled as a concept. Saab had earned a reputation for building hatchback cars that were strong and durable, but few observers at Frankfurt in 1983 imagined they were about to see an open-top car presented by a manufacturer from Scandinavia. The element of surprise was maintained right up to its unveiling because a plastic block had been inserted under the wraps of the car, giving it the silhouette of a wagon.

First produced in 1985, the Saab 900 Convertible was designed to withstand the harshest of Scandinavian winters. Customers quickly came to appreciate its robust build quality and its impressive, all-weather capabilities. Four season soft-top driving, with enough room to accommodate four adults in comfort, really was a practical proposition.

The powered, triple layer soft-top was extremely durable, snug-fitting and totally weatherproof. Instead of the conventional perspex rear window, which is prone to cracking and fogging, Saab's convertible featured a heated, glass rear screen. Today, the 9-X Air's Canopy Top takes



this a step further by completely separating the screen from the roof so that it remains in position when the roof is down to provide greater wind-cheating comfort for passengers.

Most of the few convertibles on the market 25 years ago also had somewhat awkward lines, due to the requirements of adapting a sedan body shape and accommodating a folding top.

But the Saab convertible was different. It appeared to be a unique model, rather than a sedan derivative, and looked just as good, roof up or roof down. Again, a design priority reflected in the distinctive shape of today's 9-X Air.

Brand Icon

That first Saab 900 Convertible was an instant success. Its all-year-round appeal was underlined by strong sales in markets such as the UK, where a convertible spends most of its time with the roof up and the heater on.

Spanning three incarnations, Saab convertible sales volumes have continued to increase. Almost 49,000 Saab 900 Convertibles were sold between 1987 and 1993, an average of 7,000 units a year, or 14% of all Saab 900 production. The next generation was an even greater success, with global sales from 1994 to 2002 totalling 140,500 units, an average of more than 15,500 units a year accounting for 24% of all 900/9-3 production.

Today, the current model continues to be a popular choice, with sales between 2003 and 2007 totaling more than 64,500 units, an annual average of over 16,000 cars.

While Saab does not claim to have created the convertible concept, it has played a pivotal role in popularising the format, just as it has in bringing the benefits of engine turbocharging to a wider audience.

Over the years, the Saab Convertible's success and its iconic, brand-carrying status have tempted other manufacturers enter the segment and, today, there are few who do not have a convertible model in their product line-ups. But it was Saab who led the way. Now, 25 years

on, the innovative 9-X Air shows how Saab will continue to play a lead role in the evolution of four season, four seater motoring.

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Saab Convertible by NumbersSaab has sold more than a quarter of a million convertibles worldwide. Here are 10 more fast facts about the current model:

0..... is the number of robots used in the General Assembly area at the Magna Steyr plant in Austria, where the 9-3 Convertible is built. The skilled, 750-strong workforce carries out their tasks entirely by hand.

6.....swiveling cross-braces are used to mount the soft-top, ensuring it is tightly stretched when in position with a minimum of sagging.

7.....hydraulic cylinders are used to execute 4 different movements in the operation of the soft-top.

21 degrees..... is the ideal back-rest inclination for rear passenger comfort and this was a requirement for the 9-3 Convertible, despite the packaging constraints of soft-top stowage in the trunk.

26 meters.....is the total length of the hydraulic hoses used in the roof system

99.999% is the astonishing degree of accuracy required in the operation of the soft-top. The front rail travels more than two meters from the trunk and must line up precisely with its two latching points on the windshield header rail.

140 baris the hydraulic pressure required to operate the soft-top - 56 times greater than normal tire pressure.

181 is the number of moving parts in the soft-top, controlled by a micro-processor. The main structure, including the front head-rail, is made from magnesium to save weight.

1,500 liters.....of water is sprayed over the Convertible's soft-top in a special chamber at the Magna Steyr production plant to check weatherproofing.

3,500 kilos or more than twice the weight of the car, is the impressive load that the windshield header rail and its A-pillars can support. Necessary strength for roll-over protection and good torsional rigidity.

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