

Volvo 850 R Car Review

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Extensively modified to provide exhilarating performance, the turbocharged 850 R is a Volvo for the enthusiast, rather than the type of owner who is primarily concerned about maximising ease of driving and comfort.

In manual form (as tested) particularly, the 850 R responds best to a more aggressive driving style. Drivers need to keep the engine in the right rev range, both for smooth starts and for best performance. The manual 850 R is not for drivers who like to potter around in the higher gears.

Comfort in the 850 R is compromised in the quest for sports car handling, with the low profile tyres, firmer springs and lowered suspension causing harshness and thumping at low speeds.

On the other hand, given the right conditions and driven effectively, the 850 R behaves like a thoroughbred sports car, with very strong outright performance, excellent handling (in most situations) and powerful braking.

The 850 R is the third evolution of high performance 850 series Volvos. With 185 kW on tap, it's more powerful than both the 850 T-5 (that's still available in sedan form) and the limited edition (and now discontinued) 850 T-5R.

There are two versions of the 850 R, a sedan and a wagon, and both come with manual or automatic transmission. Prices are \$79,950 for the sedan and \$81,950 for the wagon. Manuals and autos are identically priced.

Equipment levels, both from the aspect of luxury and safety, are very extensive in the 850 R. Some of the more major items include dual front airbags, side airbags plus Volvo's SIPS (side impact protection system), an integrated centre rear child safety seat, ABS brakes, TRACS traction control system, an engine immobiliser, six (sedan) and eight (wagon) speaker stereos with an in-dash CD player, electrically adjustable front seats, electronic climate-control air conditioning and a trip computer. The steering wheel is adjustable for height and reach, and there are the usual power windows and mirrors, central locking and cruise control.

Unlike some of the much rounder and curvier new models Volvo has coming shortly, the 850 sedan and wagon are from the old "square" box design philosophy. However what they lack in glamorous looks is compensated by good use of interior space.

The 850 R sedan provides good front leg and head room, along with better than average seat comfort and support. It's also a good car for carrying three adults in the back seat - space is generous and the centre position has its own head restraint and a lap/sash seat belt.

Unfortunately, having five head restraints blocks the rearward view a bit, as do the relatively thick

"B" pillars when looking to the sides.

On the road, the manual 850 R responds best to drivers who are prepared to work to get the best out of it. If you're not, it's probably best to go for the automatic version and sacrifice a little outright performance in return for smoother, easier low-speed driving.

High performance engines invariably use more fuel when you work them hard and the 850 R is no exception. It gobbled up the more expensive premium grade unleaded petrol at the rate of 14.5 litres/100 km in city and suburban type running, but did better out on the open road where consumption dropped to 9.8 litres/100 km.

The 850 R's overall standards of handling are very high, but there are limitations that show up in extreme conditions. Despite the traction control, it's still possible to break front wheel traction when accelerating on full power out of tight corners. Enter tight corners too enthusiastically and the front end wants to understeer. To be fair, both of these situations occur well beyond what would be encountered in normal driving and the 850 R is generally very capable and secure in its road manners.

Summary

It mightn't rate highly in the glamour stakes, but Volvo's 850 R certainly commands attention with its driving capabilities and levels of performance.

Purists may still prefer the ultimate handling capabilities of a rear wheel drive sports car such as the BMW M3, but the 850 R represents a practical alternative for the enthusiasts with family responsibilities.

Test vehicle supplied by **Volvo Car Australia**

Quick Facts

Make	Volvo
Model	850 R
Pluses	Outright performance Overall handling and braking Safety and luxury features Occupant and load space
Minuses	Performance characteristics at low engine revs Harsh, bumpy ride at low speeds Limited ground clearance
Country of manufacture	Sweden

Warranty	Two years, unlimited km
Models Available	Sedan Wagon
Prices	Sedan (manual and auto): \$79,950 Wagon (manual and auto): \$81,950

Specifications

Engine

Number of cylinders	5
Engine size	2.319 L
Induction	Turbocharged, with intercooler and microprocessor controlled fuel injection
Fuel	PULP
Claimed max power (kW)	185 kW @ 5600 rpm
Claimed max torque (Nm)	350 Nm @ 2400 rpm

Transmission

Type	Manual
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Wheels

Wheel type	Alloy
Wheel size	7.0 x 17 "

Tyres

Type	Pirelli / 205/45 ZR 17
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Steering

Turning circle (measured)	11.6 m
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Dimensions

Mass	1500 kg
Length	4670 mm
Width (including mirrors)	1760 mm
Height	1390 mm
Seating capacity	5
Fuel capacity	73 litres

Towing

Max towed mass (trailer plus load)	1500 kg
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NRMA Theft Rating

Points on scale 0 - 120 (high score is best)	86
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Acceleration - Test results

50 - 80km/h	4.6 secs
60 - 100km/h	5.4 secs
0 - 80km/h	6.0 secs
0 - 100km/h	7.9 secs

Fuel Consumption

Best recorded during testing	9.8 L/100km
Worst recorded during testing	14.5 L/100km
Average on test	11.4 L/100km

Braking

Distance to stop (from 80km/h)	29.0 metres
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Noise

Interior noise at constant 80km/h	66 dB(A)
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