

A Star Turn

These vintage Volvo accessory alloys are back in the spotlight

BY MARK J. McCOURT

IMAGES COURTESY VP AUTOPARTS, DON THIBAUT AND JOHN DICKEY

For more than a decade, every new Volvo sold in the U.S. has worn aluminum alloy wheels as standard equipment. Things were different in the early 1970s, when every Volvo, from the rugged 145 to the elegant 1800ES, rode on 15-inch stamped-steel wheels with small center caps. But sporting driving has been a tradition for this Swedish automaker since the 1950s, and in the 1970s, they offered another wheel choice for their enthusiast customers. While ticking the box for #283513 doesn't sound exciting, the "GT Mag Wheels with Hubcaps" that option represented brought real style and genuine performance enhancement through a reduction in unsprung weight.

After offering a rarely-purchased accessory Dunlop composite aluminum alloy/steel wheel, Volvo contracted with the German firm ATS to manufacture two all-alloy wheels for Volvo's 1973-'74 accessory catalog: One was a 14 x 5.5-inch designed for the new-for-1975 240 series, the other being this 15 x 5.5-inch fit for the 1800, 140 and 160 series.

This eye-catching five-spoke design was dubbed the Classic by its manufacturer. Featuring a stepped lip and spokes with inset center



sections, this low-pressure cast-alloy wheel offered great visual texture that was enhanced by the fan design surrounding its center bore, while the 5 x 108-mm bolt holes were strengthened with pressed-in steel bushings. The wheel was finished with chromed lug nuts and a small chrome center cap.

ATS, which also supplied the Porsche 911's polarizing "cookie cutters," actually made many versions of the Classic during this period. It was offered in sizes that included the BMC Mini's 10 x 5 inches, BMW 2002's 13 x 5 and the Porsche 914's 14 x 6. Widths stretched from 4.5 inches through 9 inches, with offsets to fit the popular cars of the day, including the Volkswagen.

Volvo advertised that its version of these GT Mag Wheels were "tested and approved for competition." Weighing only 13 pounds—one of Volvo's lightest ever—this wheel was offered in the mid-1970s for use on models built through 1974. P1800 specialist Don Thibault (www.p1800.com) knows these accessory five-spokes well. He says, "Sales were not much better than the Dunlop wheels, especially in the U.S. It could be the price was too high for Volvo buyers, or they didn't like the look, but the wheels were quickly discontinued."

Don continues: "These wheels seem to have been dumped in Canada, sold at a low price or perhaps fitted standard to get rid of them; this is why you'll find many Canadian Volkos fitted with them. Fast forward to today, and the originals are rare, but the look has aged well." And they're getting a second chance: Sweden's VP Autoparts (www.vp-autoparts.com) will soon offer ATS Classic-style alloys for rear-wheel-drive Volvo applications. Arriving in late summer, these 15 x 5.5-inch cast-aluminum wheels will come painted silver or in black with a polished aluminum lip.

Sport

- 1. GT steering wheel**
Fulfills the highest safety requirements. Covered in tuck and comfortable marine leather. For Volvo 240 and 260 Series from 1975 models.
- 2. Rev. counter**
Helps you change gear at the right engine speed. Installs in recess on instrument panel. W.a.f. 1973 car models.
- 3. GT instrument panel**
With speedometer, rev. counter, voltmeter, temperature gauge, oil pressure gauge and fuel gauge. Easy-to-read yellow graduations on black face, reflector-free glass.
- 4. GT wheel rims**
5.5" x 14". Aluminum alloy. 5.8 kg. Light, strong and extremely smart. W.a.f. 1975 models.
- 5. GT wheel rims**
5.5" x 15". Aluminum alloy. 5.9 kg. Light, strong and extremely smart. Up to 1974 models.
- 6. GT shock absorbers**
Give extremely good stability at high speeds. Removable for changing all four shock absorbers at the same time.
- 7. Gear lever knob**
Embossed Volvo-embroid. Covered in leather with comfortable pleated grip.
- 8. GT stripes**
Fluorescent, black or white.

