

## EVER WANT A SAAB?

*John Fry*

During a lifetime probably most individuals encounter at least a few breathtaking moments. Years ago in the Navy I recall being catapulted into the air from the deck of a modern aircraft carrier and a ship-to-ship transfer in a boatswain's chair in particularly nasty weather. But in retrospect, these seem as nothing compared with a much later experience in a new Saab car.

In relative youth my desire was to have a sports car to commute regularly from Edgemoor in Bethesda, Maryland to the Department of State. It was a time—a brief time it turned out—that Saab imported to the United States a handsome, fiberglass, two-place sports car known as the Saab Sonnet. On viewing a photo of this car, Bill Bass once ventured "It looks like it's racing, just sitting still." It was an exciting car, tough for me to give up, even to one of our sons, as I moved on.

It wasn't until Toni and I moved to Stockholm years later that Saab reentered my life. It happened through my membership in Sällskapet, a club founded in 1800, "to provide the opportunity for pleasant social life," now including "businessmen, civil servants, lawyers, diplomats, industrialists, doctors, and publishers." Surprisingly, one late summer day in 1986, Toni and I were invited by the Club's Secretary to join nine other members and their wives for a five day visit to Finland, with which, historically, Sweden has experienced both peaceful and violent ties. We happily accepted for a memorable time of our lives.

One of Saab's major manufacturing and testing facilities was located inland from the Åland Islands near Turku, Finland. A Saab 6 sedan, fresh from another factory in Sweden, along with the company's top test driver, was flown there to demonstrate for us the dazzling performance of this new car. After a guided, motorized tour of the Turku plant with more active robots than most people might ever see in their lifetime, we drove to the test track, where our car and driver were waiting. He explained the track and open area had been oiled and watered and encouraged volunteers to join him for a showcase run. A number did, including Toni, who returned with "Wow!" When everyone who wanted had their turns together in the back seat, I gullibly asked to ride alone, in the front passenger seat, and have him show me what the car could do. My advice now is never to ask such a thing of a test car driver. Unsure of how many g's one can withstand before blacking out, his thrilling, ten-minute display of carmanship came close for me. Thank goodness for my relative youth at the time, I would never risk this again. ■