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Saab 9-5 sedan

For all fans

review | Having lots of fans must make life easy. A new CD or film is a foregone success, because all the fans will buy a copy for sure. Saab also seems to have it easy, because the car maker has such loyal fans than they don't even consider switching to another brand. When Saab was in dire straits, the fans even tried to rescue "their" brand. Now Saab introduces the all-new 9-5. Will the 9-5 appeal to more than just the fans?

Saab has had a rough time. It all started with recycling the same old models for years on end. Based on an exciting model, new versions were made, but never an all-new car. Under new management Saab finally got the chance to develop a truly new car and the 9-5 is the first example.

More importantly: the new 9-5 is a true Saab and not a car that has obviously been developed based on parts of other cars from the same holding. As it should be with a Saab, the design is distinguished but not extravagant. The car has a unique charm that can only be the product of a Swedish designer. Compared to a Volvo, the Saab 9-5 is more high-tech and outspoken.

Interior

Saab likes to emphasise its heritage as an airplane constructor and that is obvious with the new 9-5. Just like Saabs from the (distant) past the dashboard is clearly built around the driver, like a cockpit.

Compared to the previous model the cabin has less buttons, making the dashboard of the new model less crowded. The most important functions can now be operated safely from the steering wheel. A touch screen is used to control most other functions. This touch sensitive screen does deserve a special note because the graphics are very beautiful.

Also very nice to look at is the "head-up display": essential information like the actual speed and instructions from the satnav are projected against the windscreen. In this way the data seems to hover in the landscape, right in view of the driver. A display between the traditional speedometer and rev counter shows additional information like the average fuel consumption. In the same display a camera reads traffic signs and shows data, like the actual speed limit as a reminder.

As usual, Saab distinguishes itself by sublime seats and the 9-5 is no exception. Just sitting behind the wheel of the 9-5 feels so good that this alone is a good reason to buy the car! Also, the 9-5 doesn't only offer ample space in the front, but in the back as well. This doesn't go at the expense of the boot, which is also very spacious.

Diesel

Under the name "right sizing" the new generation of Saabs isn't fitted with oversized engines, but with engines that make the most out of the smallest possible displacement. In this way the brand wants to combine good performance with modest fuel consumption.

The test car has a 2.0 litre diesel engine which develops 160 PS / 350 Nm. It is combined with a six-speed automatic gearbox. This lightest engine on the price list doesn't give the 9-5 the grandeur Saab promises. The power train is clearly audible; while it is also noticeable when the automatic gearbox changes gears.

The "2.0 TiD" doesn't deliver a continuous flood of power, like many cars in this segment do. It is only when the throttle is pressed all the way to floor, the automatic gearbox shifts down, and the engine starts to rev, that the 9-5 diesel then performs like a car of this type should. As soon as the desired speed is reached, the gearbox immediately shifts up again to save fuel.

This certainly isn't a bad thing, it is merely a choice of Saab. It doesn't make the 9-5 a challenging or a fast car, but it does make the 9-5 a very relaxing drive. On top of that, this character makes it easy to drive even more economically than the factory figures promise. According to Saab the "9-5 2.0 TiD Vector SE automatic" does 41 miles to the gallon; during this test drive it was 43.5 miles.

Handling

Depending on the engine, each 9-5 comes with different suspension. Therefore it is important to take a test drive with the car of your exact choice and not accept a similar vehicle; a different engine means different handling.

The base model driven here feels like a base model as well. The suspension isn't particularly firm, making steering and roadholding no more than fair. When doing an emergency stop, it even required some skill to keep the car in a straight line.

The "2.0 TiD" isn't meant as a sporty car, but instead as a luxury vehicle to cover long distances in comfort. This is what the 9-5 does very well and efficiently. Thanks to the whole presentation even the base model has a true Saab spirit, making it feel like you are travelling in style.

Conclusion

Is the Saab 9-5 only meant for the true fans or does this car have more to offer? The fans certainly won't be disappointed. The new 9-5 is a true Saab thanks to it distinguished design and clever ergonomics. However, do not expect a challenging or a sporty car. Even the base model driven here is meant to be a comfortable, relaxing car.

Will the 9-5 also seduce buyers who now drive other brands of cars? Without a doubt! Those who think German cars are too sterile, Italians too extravagant and Japanese too boring, will feel right at home in this Swedish limousine. And that feeling can also be rationalised. The 9-5 offers above average space, performs well while using modest amounts of fuel and has a fair price tag. The fan club is now accepting new members... ■

Specifications
Saab 9-5 sedan

Size and weight

Length x width x height	501 x 187 x 147 cm
Wheelbase	284 cm
Kerb weight	1.575 kg
Trailer	750 kg
Trailer - braked	1.700 kg
Fuel capacity	70 l
Luggage space	513 l
Tyre size	225/55R17

Engine and performance

Capacity	1956 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
power	160 PS @ 4000 rpm
Max torque	350 Nm @ 1750 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	9.2 secs
Top speed	215 km/h
Average mileage	5.3 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	unknown
Mileage extra urban	unknown
CO2 emissions	139 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 26,495
Price base model	Â£ 26,495