

Volvo YCC coupe: Designed with women in mind

BY DEIRDRE O'SHEA
Copley News Service

At a European auto show, a team of five women designers and engineers from Volvo made a splash with a showcase vehicle — a sporty coupe made specifically to meet the needs of women drivers. Known as the YCC (Your Concept Car), it was on display for the first time at the 2004 Geneva Motor Show.

Volvo says the idea behind the YCC is that “women have higher standards for their cars than men.”

Auto industry experts agree that women in the United States greatly influence car-buying decisions in their families. And women account for roughly half of automobile sales.

“If you divide the car-buying world into three segments — budget, mid-market and premium — our customer research shows that the woman buyer in the premium segment is the most demanding of all customer categories,” said Maria Widell Christiansen, project manager for design. Although Volvo doesn't have plans to produce the YCC, it's only a matter of time before other models incorporate some of its ideas.

The YCC has many features aimed at improving the comfort level of women drivers. The designers focused on three areas: ergonomics, storage and convenience.

For example, the gull-wing doors open wide, so getting in



Photo/Copley News Service

The YCC (Your Concept Car) was on display for the first time at the 2004 Geneva Motor Show. The designers, all women, focused on three areas: ergonomics, storage and convenience. This vehicle is being touted as having a design with women in mind.

and out is easier. A keyless sensor can even open them for a driver with her arms full. The headrest has a split in the middle to accommodate a ponytail. A body-scanning system, activated when the driver puts a foot on the heel support pedal, adjusts the driver's seat, seat belts, pedals, steering wheel and headrest automatically.

There are other design elements so practical, so obvious, that consumers have to wonder

why other car designers haven't thought of them already. For example, the back seats work like seats in a movie theater; the seat part stays folded until needed, leaving space behind the front seat for totes, shopping bags and briefcases.

The YCC has some handy storage solutions, too. Between the front seats is the most convenient place for things a driver wants to have within reach, but that's where

compartment for cell phones, sunglasses, lipstick, coins and other small items. This compartment slides back to expose a large space big enough for a handbag. There's another space for a laptop, and a wastebasket as well.

Most of all, women know that no interior anywhere should look the same forever. The YCC has seat covers that are interchangeable and eight styles to choose from. They are attached by magnets, so

the parking brake and gearshift are.

“So we moved them,” said Cindy Charwick, who designed the YCC interior. “In the YCC, there are gear levers by the steering wheel, and the parking brake is electronic and integrated. This freed up space for storage in the center console.”

The console has a shallow

that women can decorate with their moods or the seasons. (Imagine a nice wool boucle around Christmas, followed by a yellow embroidered look for spring.) And since the seat covers can be taken out, they can be cleaned.

Some of the design features are geared toward making driving easier. A parallel-parking aid has a “Do I fit in?” sensor. Clearly, men could use this too. There's no gas cap. As in a racing car, the gas nozzle goes in through a roller-ball valve, which is quicker and easier.

Volvo makes the assumption that women aren't interested in doing car maintenance themselves, so the hood doesn't open; it's all one molded piece. (The washer fluid is filled up next to the gas tank.) Instead, a Volvo mechanic handles that. The car even sends the garage a wireless message when there are problems. The mechanic would then call the owner, presumably. The YCC even has special easy-to-clean paint.

It may not be a real car — yet — but the YCC certainly takes convenience in a new direction. Anyone who has ever treasured a travel mug because it fits so beautifully in the car's cup holder knows that details matter. With women practically living in their cars as they juggle home and work responsibilities, a low-maintenance, user-friendly vehicle designed to fit everything sounds about perfect.

Top ten mistakes when cleaning your vehicle inside and out

BY TOM TRACEY
Special to the Record-Eagle

Vehicles travel roads covered with debris. The pros at www.detaildepot.com list the top ten washing goofs:

1. Washing on a sunny day

Droplets of water focus sun light on a vehicle's finish like a magnifying glass. Soapy water will dry before being rinsed, causing spots (and possible damage). Wash a cool vehicle on a cloudy day or in a shaded area, rinsing often.

2. Washing exterior first

To avoid dragging sweat and dirt inside a vehicle, clean the interior first while you are still clean yourself.

3. Missing the cracks

Water alone won't create rust, but water combined with dirt will. Spray areas where dirt hides, such as underneath doors and wheel wells.

4. Mixing cleaner/waxes

Polishing shines by peeling away a thin layer of worn paint. Waxing protects the fresh surface. You can do one

or the other well, but not both simultaneously.

5. Waxing non-wax areas

If wax dries on porous black plastic, it will turn the part (like door handles) gray. Use products designed for plastic.

6. Starting with windows

To avoid smearing just-cleaned windows, save them for last. Use new “invisible” glass cleaners, not ammonia-based ones, which leave film.

7. Using the wrong product on the wrong material

Protective products designed

to shine vinyl (door panels) are not meant for clear plastic (lenses). For dashboards, choose a low gloss finish to avoid distracting reflections.

8. Ignoring leather seats

Dirt can get into the grains and pores of leather, cutting and cracking the surface. Keep seats clean with a product specifically for leather.

9. Cleaning carpet “lines”

To avoid “drying lines” later, push the front seats all the way back when cleaning the front carpet, and forward

when cleaning the rear carpet. Also, open windows slightly to allow drying and avoid odor-causing mold.

10. Too much of a good thing.

A mass-produced factory paint job is no match for a meticulously prepared show vehicle. Clear coat is thin, and can be removed by unnecessary polishing or mechanical buffing. When properly applied with quality products, a hand polish and wax should last the season.