

Saab vs.
Scepticism



Rescuing a Saab 9-3 HOT Aero

by Matt Barwell*

*Raw and Unabridged

“Had I not seen the 9-3 on Saab vs. Scepticism or dropped the mobile on my head that night, there is no way I’d have purchased this car, although on the other hand I would have been a couple of grand richer!”

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I've always considered myself a 'car man' but as I get older and slowly more mature, my commitments and responsibilities naturally increase, ultimately shaping the type of vehicle I end up buying.

These commitments and needs have moved me from a petrol drinking V8 4x4 to a 1.8 diesel focus estate. Although I have to say the focus has been a fantastic workhorse for my 80 mile return commute and saved me an untold amount of cash, over the years, it had made me forget how hot cars can actually be. I eventually filled this void somewhat with a motorbike using it to save me time on my commute but definitely not money. No one really tells you this but motorcycles may be cheaper to buy and on many occasions more economical than cars, but they are definitely not the cheaper option in general. Shorter service intervals, and expensive bits to replace not to mention faster wearing rubber can actually make them an expensive long distance commuter.

Anyway not to go off on a tangent but one night I was sat up in bed browsing you tube, video after video, until I somehow ended up watching clips showing cars from the Saab museum in Trollhättan These clips got my attention as I'd never really considered a Saab before, to be honest when I was young I'm talking about 9 or 10 I was a bit put off by Saab as the older members of my own family (*west-indian, like me*) who owned Saab 900 turbo's, would always pull up whenever I'd see them, playing some old-school reggae music I could

never quite understand. The music was different than my choice at that age and the car was different too. Back then I couldn't see what they did, and didn't value individuality...but now as a man I do, and finally get it.

Not only did they like to choose the 'other option' but in many cases they had the better car too.

After watching various clips on Saab I started browsing googles images and looking at eBay to see what the going rate for some of these cars were today out of interest. When suddenly I hit an image of a good looking convertible 9-3 and came across this site, Saab vs scepticism, and there it was in many close up shots a beautiful and immaculate 9-3.

Immediately I knew I was going to get myself one of them, I hadn't really put much thought into it, neither did I need a car or have a use for it really but that became all secondary because I had changed my mind and wanted one. In that same Champaign Gold colour, before I left the site I took a screen shot of all the pictures of it to my phone then headed back on to eBay. From there I saw a few nice ones, but nothing quite right. Either it wasn't an aero or was the wrong colour or too much money (*the irony as you'll later read*) Then (*and I kid you not*)... I fell asleep dropping the phone directly on my face, which woke me up with a smack, I lifted my phone from my neck which it rested ready to put it down when, there it was, a 2002 Saab 9-3 just like the one I wanted. Well not just like it but, the potential was there and that was good enough for me!

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I looked further and down and saw a buy-it-now price that was so low , I thought knew there had to be a catch ... ok first was ... Edinburgh which is over 420 miles away from me, the second was there was a rattling from the engine bay... knowing my luck I know what to expect.. a knackered engine.

One further thing that bothered me, was a lack of photos, in fact it just had the one, which was of half of the bonnet. It didn't have long left so I knew nobody was interested, probably for the reasons mentioned above. Still even in my sleepy state I thought to myself, well at least ask him for a few more pictures and if it looks ok , I'd think about it tomorrow, and that's exactly what I did.

The next day I received an email from the seller with an extra 3 or 4 'selected' photos with a note stating £100 less than the asking price will take it. My now fully awake brain told me to walk away from it as the car would need a major mechanical rebuild not to mention anything potentially wrong with the body work... but did I listen like any sane person would? No, Instead I made the offer of £100 less than the asking price and the sale was completed.

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My first job was picking it up.. For the life of me I couldn't convince any garage claiming to be a Saab specialist

in or around Edinburgh to collect and repair the thing, no matter how hard I tried. Most were just astonished that I had bought and paid for a broken old car I'd never seen. To make matters worse I looked into the cost of transporting the car home and it wasn't pretty, in fact it would have worked out to be more than I spent on the car if I wasn't careful and frankly that money would be better spent on repairing it.

I was worried that I was going to pay the price for my impulsive decision... but then I remembered reading about the praise of Malcolm Miles. Being my last option I gave the guys there a call and that was it, they were welcoming over the phone and agreed to take the car in no problems

I then managed to get a good transportation deal on Uship to move the car from Edinburgh to Leicester and they set to work on saving a car that was really only a step or two away from the scrapyard.

It wasn't good news as the car needed many new bits some of which were engine, exhaust, turbo, brake disks and pads, tyres, hoses all over the place, timing chain and many other bits. It wasn't going to be cheap, but I'd already passed the point of no return and if I'd stopped now that would have been the bigger sin.

As I knew some of the cost involved, when Malcolm Miles told me they couldn't start the job for a week or two I was secretly delighted! Dreading the inevitable bill.

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If only the convertible 9-3 on Saab vs scepticism hadn't looked so good to suck me in!!

Finally the day came and it was time to collect my first ever Saab... I remember buying my rail ticket and waiting outside the rail station just like you had written about on his post.

And there it was as my Aero HOT 9-3. The same 9-3 circumstances were pushing for me to cut my losses and leave for dead in Edinburgh, the same 9-3 that needed so much work that it was a real possibility it would never be seen the road again.

Now as it pulled up, it sounded throaty and healthy... The body was ok besides that front bumper but besides that, it wasn't too bad. From the station Jason from Malcolm Miles drove us back to the garage to give me a breakdown of all the work and the current car condition.

There he kept the old bits and concluded that the car had basically died from a lack of maintenance (oil changes) short trips and driven hard. Which coincides with the damage to the front bumper.

From there he showed me a massive hole in the rusty old exhaust he had replaced, so big it looked like a crater in the moon. Apparently both these of should have had teeth but one has completely worn away Next the brake disc was thin rusty and worn, the pads non-existent. The turbo was a big story teller because unlike most turbos that go, and the blades rock side to side in its housing, however this turbo was rocking forwards and backwards which I'm told is the result of a vehicle which has been driven hard for long periods !

Finally looking inside the old rocker cover you could see burnt globs of oil... you don't need to be a mechanic to know that, that isn't good.

But what is good was the drive, driving the car back was awesome in the truest sense, I'd forgotten not only how quick but how fun cars can be. Now there is still loads of work to do like shocks and springs all round as well as the dreaded pixels in the dash repairs and cleaning up the leather seats, and the body work repairs but already I'm starting to see the fruits of my determination.

Finally, I made a mistake by taking a gamble on a local garage to repair the bumper and clean up the wheels for a fantastically low price, but I have learnt a lesson I'll take forward on this project, which is always take your car to the professionals as it can be a false economy to have a cheap repair. In my case the repair of the bumper was ok but the paint doesn't match meaning I have to pay for the job to be done again...by a body shop I know I should have gone to in the first place!

Once this is sorted the bonnet and bumper will look awesome...

I'll keep you guys updated!



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