

Saab 9-3 Convertible

Super cool...

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The 9-3 convertible reflects Saab's leading role in the premium convertible segment and is the product of more than twenty-five years experience in designing four-seater, four season soft tops that are as practical as they are stylish.

The 9-3 2.0T Aero convertible I had on test looked stunning in white with its contrasting black hood. Well-balanced proportions and a purposeful stance endow the car with a strong, dynamic character that, roof up or down, echoes its fun-to-drive appeal. The interior provides accommodation for four adults and shares the cockpit feel and driver-focused themes of the Saloon and SportWagon.

The 210bhp turbo powertrain crammed into the two door, auto model, offers excellent refinement and driveability. Even with an auto box the Saab's traditional strengths of high torque for strong, mid-range pulling power are present. This makes for swift and safe overtaking. That said, the powerful lump doesn't deliver cheek rippling acceleration from a standing start. Far from it. It does, however, provide a level of responsive performance in keeping with the chassis's excellent dynamics.

The impressive looks of the latest Saab 9-3 Convertible radiate power, dynamic performance and great strength; all elegantly packaged with a Scandinavian design flair that ensures the lines are clean and flowing, but never cold or clinical. It is an open top car that looks like a unique model in its own right, free from any awkward styling compromises. In fact the car looks just as good, top up or top down - effortlessly exchanging the looks of a coupé for those more

akin to a roadster. Inside, the driver-focused cabin features a main instrument panel that gently arcs round the driver. The controls are all logically grouped; those most frequently used being nearest to hand and closest to the driver's natural field of vision. The short gearshift lever is just a hand span away, while the main dials are recessed in traditional Saab fashion. They are white on black and softly illuminated in green - a very easy-on-the eye colour choice for night driving.

Saab has a reputation for comfortable seats and the flagship 9-3 Convertible doesn't disappoint. The well-shaped front seats have been specially designed for the Convertible. They provide easy entry/exit for rear seat passengers by simply lifting a lever on the outboard corner of the back-rest, which then folds down, allowing the entire seat to be easily pushed forward. The movement is spring-loaded and requires only a light pressure to move the seat.

So, if you want to shop around for a safe, comfortable, stylish, open top car - and you have the cash to splash on a new car - then a Saab showroom is an ideal place to start looking.

Tim Barnes-Clay

FACTS AND FIGURES

- Max speed: 140 mph
- 0-62 mph: 9.5 seconds (auto)
- Combined mpg: 30.4 (auto)
- Engine: 1998 cc, 4 cylinder, turbo petrol
- Max. power (bhp): 210 at 5300 rpm
- Max. torque (lb/ft): 220 at 2500-4000 rpm
- CO2: 214 g/km (auto)
- Price: £33,570 On the road

