

Volvo's Driver: Björn Ahlström



This spring Björn Ahlström decided to enter his first marathon. Although an avid jogger and tennis player, the Swedish-American business leader had never run the grueling 26+ mile race before. He entered the Los Angeles Marathon and not only finished — he placed 13th in his age group and 1500th in a field of 19,000 runners.

It's easy to see Ahlström as a long-distance runner. His career at Volvo North America Corporation has been for the "long-distance". His vision of the Volvo automobile is that of a family car that evolves slowly over time in design and engineering to be a long-lasting, high quality vehicle. Volvos are never marketed for their latest design frills or engineering gimmicks as many Detroit products are. After all, this is the automobile whose early advertising campaign was built on lasting "an average of 11 years in near-Arctic Sweden".

Although Ahlström has been with Volvo for over 20 years, he did not begin his business career with the Swedish automotive giant. After being graduated from the University of Gothenburg in 1956 with an M.B.A., he began work for IBM Sweden and rose to vice president of IBM's Data Processing Division before joining Volvo in 1968. For four years he was director of worldwide marketing for AB Volvo of Gothenburg. In 1972 he was named President and Chief Executive Officer of Volvo North America Corporation, a position he holds today.

Ahlström has presided over an unprecedented expansion of Volvo's position on the American automotive

playing field. Not only has the company moved into related manufacturing fields such as marine engines and truck production, but it has also grown from a small East Coast presence with 400 employees to a firm encompassing over three dozen manufacturing and marketing sites with 6000 employees. Annual sales have jumped from \$200 million a year to well over \$3.6 billion in the 16 years Ahlström has been at the helm.

The 55-year-old executive became an American citizen in 1980. He and wife Kay (who is president of the New York firm of Hemming & Gilman) live in New Jersey, not far from the Volvo headquarters in Rockleigh. Among his many civic activities Ahlström finds time to serve as a director of the Swedish-American Chamber of Commerce and is a member of the Council's Royal Round Table. He has received numerous awards including the Royal Order of the North Star from King Carl XVI Gustaf in 1981.

No award can compare, however, with the satisfaction that was his after he completed his first marathon in Los Angeles. For Ahlström's passion is sports and physical fitness. He encourages Volvo employees to follow his lead and challenges them to run for 30 consecutive minutes on a treadmill in the company's gym. Ahlström's passion has led as well to Volvo's significant involvement in U.S. sporting events. Since 1973 the company has sponsored professional tennis, and now has added recreational and collegiate events as well. It is now in its fifth year as a sponsor of the Newport Regatta, a world-class sailing race that compares with the most prestigious in the world. For New Sweden '88 Volvo added the Volvo/San Francisco Regatta, a successful race which included over 125 boats and has since become an annual event.



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