2.0 Choosing a 9000

With a bewildering choice of models and engines, deciding which model to choose is anything but easy. The obvious choice is for a full blown Aero or 200bhp Anniversary but such machines do not come cheap and (with the former) running costs and increased insurance premiums must be factored in. Griffin models with all the optional equipment as standard make a lot of sense… if you can find them! Bear in mind that full pressure 2.3 turbo cars seem much less plentiful after 1994 and are correspondingly more expensive.

Don't rule out non turbo cars - these can be surprisingly economical on long distance work and will cost less to insure, too. From a DIY maintenance perspective, these cars make most sense of all, being much easier to work on because the engine bays are less cluttered.

After running both the saloon and hatch models from various model years, the author is convinced that the saloons, for all their slightly ungainly looks are probably most refined although load space in the hatch is simply unbeatable. Ultimately, it would be a mistake to focus on one particular model to the exclusion of all others. It is wiser by far to make a decision based on condition, rather than year or style and it may well be necessary to travel!

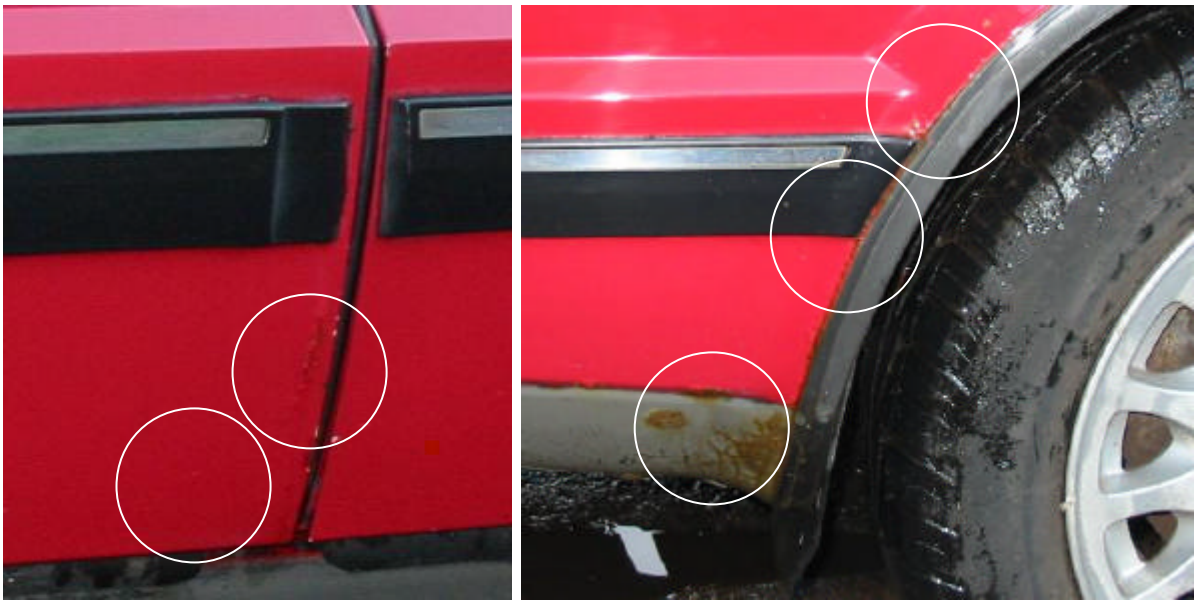
2.1 Sorting the sheep from the goats (and the dogs!)

The 9000 range when new was held in high regard as an executive model from a prestige car maker. As such, the 9000 can be fitted with a host of complex optional equipment. Many cars will have been subject to loving care and sympathetic driving but others will have been soundly thrashed. Sorting the tired cars from better examples may seem daunting but need not be as difficult as expected, even for the novice.

Below: *an unmarked interior is usually a very good measure of a car's general condition. This car is a 1994 9000 CSE V6 with optional leather seat facings and electric memory adjustment.*

One very good but not infallible indicator of a car's general condition is the state of the interior. Clean, unscuffed seat facings and door cards usually point to the fastidious owner who will have been equally attentive to servicing. Check the toolkit (located on the driver's side of the luggage boot) is complete - it should be there on a car with good service history. If it isn't, worry about the competence of anyone who hasn't even the basic kit that ships with the car or failed to replace it after emergency use.

Rust should not be a serious worry and checking is easy. Much of this is common sense - avoid anything with really tatty bodywork: stone chips are a sign of honest work but rust spells neglect and possible poor quality body repair work after an accident. Earlier pre-1990 cars can suffer from serious rust in the roof panel, especially if a sliding sunroof is fitted, so check carefully for any signs of bubbling or blistering because an effective repair is time-consuming, ergo expensive. . Doors on pre CS models too can suffer to the point that the bottoms can resemble lace curtains. This is often due to water being trapped in the door bottoms, sometimes due to blocked drain holes. Repair is possible but please note that the drillings for the fasteners for the body mouldings vary between considerably between variants and check strap design varies if used doors are to be acquired! This means that later CS doors can't be fitted easily to flat front models without work.



Above: *check ALL models for rust blisters in the door bottoms (Left) and the rear wheel arch bottom aft of the rear wheel where mud collects. Circled areas are rust 'hot spots'.*

Headlamp lenses are not cheap but are at least available although second-hand ones can cost up to £30 each. With CD models and facelift pre CS hatchbacks (1991-2) do check that the top leading edges of the combined front indicator sidelamp units have not been damaged by careless closing of the bonnet.

Left: *check the top leading edge of front indicators on CD models/facelift hatches for damage*

Whilst examining the exterior of a car, bear in mind that some models have a reflective décor panel, sometimes referred to a tail blazer. This item is very susceptible to fading on early cars but all models are prone to cracks, chips and less than careful reversing manoeuvres. Replacement is frighteningly expensive – allow £75 even for a good used unit from a breaker's yard! On ***all*** models ensure that ham fisted mechanics have not forgotten to refit the front (2-piece) inner wheel arch liners, as this will leave the front wings exposed to road grime and salt during the Winter months.

Below: *not all cars will have unmarked coachwork like this exceptional FSH 2 owner 80,000 mile 1997 Anniversary in Scarabe Green. Note the 8-spoke alloys and Aero style bodykit.*

Running gear is generally robust but many cars have covered large mileages and there are several potentially expensive problems that can be avoided. A full SAAB dealer (or specialist) history is almost essential, particularly with automatic cars, where the gearbox MUST be drained and have its filter changed at least every 24,000 miles to avoid expensive problems later. Checking the fluid level and colour on the gearbox dipstick will reveal little about the overall condition of the autobox. Instead, the car should be driven at least ten miles, as 'boxes sometimes loose drive when the fluid gets warm. Upshifts should be smooth and it should be possible to select drive and reverse from the Park position (when stationary with the foot on the brake) without the car jerking violently. There should not be any delay more than a second between selecting D or R with the lever – more than this indicates a problem.

Manual gearboxes sometimes prove troublesome too – beware of difficulty in selecting reverse gear (1994 on cars in particular) and general noise (all years). Cars with tired clutches are not cheap to fix, as the clutch slave cylinder is positioned inside the gearbox. It is worthwhile checking vendors have not left tins of brake fluid in the luggage boot and a glance under the gearbox for damp patches is worthwhile, as fluid leaks can escape from the rubber plugs in the gearbox base.

Be advised that the 9000 engines have timing chains, rather than toothed belts and these can and *do* wear from 70,000 miles. Beware noisy chains that are audible on tickover when the engines is warm! Very regular oil changes at 6000 mile intervals help minimise wear - the bits alone will cost around £400 to renew the chains, guides, gears and tensioners. My message is... you can buy an AWFUL lot of oil for £400, so don't let it happen! The author has sold recently a very fine 1993 9000CDE 2.3 Turbo - at 158,000 miles the chains are untouched and silent: testimony to the previous owner's attention to servicing and careful driving.

The 9000 is a strong car but design focussed on protecting the passengers. In a frontal impact crash, damage is often transmitted through the bumper to the chassis legs and door aperture. Tell tale damage to the centre of the roof is virtually impossible to repair and another giveaway is difficulty in closing or opening doors. For this reason it is almost essential to use a company like HPI to check that the vehicle is not listed on the VCAR (vehicle condition alert register) after a serious accident.

It is a very good idea to check all the electrical equipment works. Cars with TCS (Traction Control) can suffer from a rough or erratic idle. Fixing this is not easy, as not all dealers still have the equipment or knowledge to investigate. Used parts are in short supply and substituting known good units seldom works. In any event, when a new/used TCS ecu is fitted, it needs to be reprogrammed to suit. Some specialists known to the author, have scrapped otherwise perfectly good cars because of persistent TCS woes. There is no obvious answer here, as cars so equipped have a different wiring loom and throttle body to standard.

Problems with electric mirrors or window lifters are not unknown and sometimes the resistor block for the blower fan fails, leaving the fan operating only at full speed. This is more of an irritation than anything else: replacement is quick and relatively inexpensive. Motors on electrically adjustable (or memory) seats sometimes fail and it is worth checking that the electric seat heaters that are a boon in Winter still work, as repairs are fiddly and really require hog ring pliers to undo the clips that secure covers to the seat frames.

One trap for the unwary relates to the washer tank reservoir, which around 1992 was relocated from the passenger side of the car to the driver's side, partly in the interests of easier maintenance but also to accommodate the fitting of impact sensors for the SRS system. This means all CS/CSE hatches will be so equipped and CD saloons from 1992. The tank is mounted behind the front wing on two long bolts, the heads of which are located in hexagonal recesses in the plastic. Inevitably, movement caused by normal driving can cause leaks. Repair is awkward as the wheel arch liners and the wing must be removed. Worse still, the tank itself is a decidedly unfunny £60 or so to buy. Often, leaks are caused by nothing more than a weeping T piece next to the tank, but it pays to be informed of the 'worse case scenario' and can lever a bargaining advantage, if trying to purchase.

On the subject of leaks, be not misled by a pool of *clear* water beneath the car after a run with the air-conditioning (or climate system) running. One owner known well to the author arrived looking slightly depressed one day clutching a new water pump. After it was pointed out that the coolant was a health blue colour and that the screen

wash tank contained a solution of methylated spirits, our friend was very puzzled until he remembered that his domestic refrigerator produced copious amounts of water too. Even so, the water pump was fitted, just for added peace of mind on a planned continental trip.

Coolant in the cooling system reservoir should look fairly clean and not resemble oxtail soup. Cars with service histories usually have dealer tags to show when the coolant was last renewed. Water in the oil caused by a blown head gasket is quite unmistakable: not only will the car be boiling its brains out but the oil will resemble mayonnaise and there will be oil in the coolant reservoir. This is notoriously difficult to remove, so do not be unduly worried if a potential purchase shows signs of black oil in the tank but the coolant and oil are nice and clean. In such cases, ask the vendor who did the work and when, for added peace of mind, for it may be that the overheat was caused by a defective radiator (which may not have been changed). The presence of stickers (yellow background, red border) on the opposite side of the engine bay show when the brake fluid was last changed.

Under the bonnet, oil leaks around the cambox gasket on all 9000s are fairly common. Replacement gaskets are inexpensive and easy to fit. On V6 cars, however, access is far more difficult, as much more dismantling is required. Spark plug apertures on the B308 engine (V6) often fill with oil but since the plugs on this engine require changing at 40,000 intervals, this usually goes undetected. Leaks around the power steering pipes leading to the system reservoir (off-side front inner wing) are often due to loose hose clips.

Working around the front of the engine, (2 litre and 2.3 engined cars only) do check that the exhaust manifold studs are present and none are snapped, as these are very difficult to fix with the cylinder head in place on the engine. More often than not, the studs become wasted and weakened so that hard driving or attempts to remove the nuts from the stud result in snapping.

With turbo charged cars offering remarkable power for the money, some will have been driven quite hard. As a result, items like engine mountings can suffer, although this can sometimes be hard to detect. The engines are mounted on two (expensive) hydraulic mountings fitted to the subframe on the driver's side of the car and supplemented by a steady bar (torque arm) with two large rubber bushes on top of the engine. These are frequently split – replacement is not expensive but a 10 ton hydraulic press was required to change one which failed on the author's own V6 9000CSE, which has a similar arrangement.

On the nearside of the car, the gearbox mounting may be past its best, too. Excess movement leads to judder on take-off (the right word for a turbo!) and this can, in time, lead to gear selection problems, as the metalastic sandwich joint connecting the gearbox to the gearlever selector rod can start to break up. It is worth noting that uprated Polyurethane bushes are available for the steady bar torque arms and gearbox mounting, as well as for things like the anti roll bars. These are available from specialists like Elkparts and Abbott Racing.

3.0 Performance

Even normally aspirated 2 litre cars (135bhp) should be capable of 120 mph+ and 0-60 in just under 10 seconds, whereas turbos are 2 seconds faster with almost 140 mph available. Normally aspirated 2.3 cars are rated at 150 bhp and although they are obviously faster, the real difference only becomes apparent when towing.

Later Eco Light Pressure Turbo (LPT) cars have different gearing for more relaxed cruising and better economy. The 2litre (B204) LPT engine is rated at 150bhp, whilst the 2.3 LPT develops a useful 170bhp. Although 225bhp Aeros and Carlssons are very exciting to drive, they incur increased insurance premiums. All full pressure turbo charged cars have superb mid range acceleration, especially at 70mph and more because the turbo charger is spinning at optimum speed with no delay in spool up time. This often translates into major embarrassment for tailgating GT Johnny in the BMW and such vehicles rapidly recede into the mirror as the 'power on demand' facility is used. For best effect, remove the turbo badging… The author has achieved over 30mpg on sustained high speed running (up to 130 mph) in an FPT 2.3 somewhere in Europe, whilst a standard 2 litre injection regularly returned 38mpg on the M1. In contrast, local town driving in traffic jam afflicted Sunderland brings a 2 litre turbo consumption down to the low 20s, whilst the V6 seemed to return between 28 and 32mpg pretty much all the time, irrespective of the type of use.

3.1 Colours (this is not a comprehensive list)

Type	*SAAB Name*	*Generic colour type*	*Code*
Solid	Cirrus	White	153
	Carrara	White (Cream)	233
	Black	Black	170
	Embassy	Navy blue	198
	Imola	Red (Scarlet)	240
Metallic	Amethyst	Violet (Anniversary models only)	258
	Berylium	Green (Jade)	226
	Cayenne	Red (Copper)	256
	Citrin	Gold (Champagne)	227
	Eucalyptus	Green	235
	Le Mans	Blue	229
	Midnight	Navy	257
	Nocturne	Blue	234
	Odoarado	Grey	223
	Platana	Grey	228
	Ruby	Red (Burgundy)	242
	Scarabe	Green (dark: similar to British Racing Green)	230
	Sky	Blue (Lightish steel blue)	252
	Willow	Green	254

Also: Cherry Red (*Pre-1990 only*), Silver Metallic, Rose Quartz (*1986/7/8 only*)

Colour choice is terribly subjective – even so, the author believes that earlier cars look best in Berylium, whilst CS models really suit Scarabe and Ruby. The Anniversary in Amethyst is irresistible… Black is timeless (but requires commitment to maintain the lustre) and Le Mans looks great… when clean and polished to a fine shine.

3.2 Typical optional equipment

- *Leather upholstery by Elmo or Bridge of Weir (some with memory seats)*
- *Alloys – various styles in 15 or 16"*
- *ABS (Anti lock brake system) NB all 9000s have discs on all four corners.*
- *Air conditioning: on demand cool air in the cabin (see CCS)*
- *CCS (Climate control system) Set a temperature and the system does the rest.*
- *SSR (Sliding glass/metal sunroof) Power sunroof may/may not be fitted with a/c or CCS.*
- *TCS (Traction Control System) a mixed blessing… later cars are switchable.*
- *Wood kit: many cars have wood fascias but door fillets and console trim were extra.*
- *Front centre arm rest*
- *Various audio options: including CD auto changer, amplifier, RDS stereo cassette etc*

3.3 Parts prices

Some parts are quite pricey and the high cost of units like engines and gearboxes means that good used parts command high prices. Used autoboxes can be had for £300-450 depending on model year, whilst engines can fetch up to £650 for late cars. It pays to shop around!

Timing chain replacement should be avoided at all cost, as the job at a dealer can cost up to £1500 because very often, the cylinder head needs to be removed.

Oil: use good quality semi synthetic ***and change at 6,000 mile intervals or at least once a year***! Do find out the percentage of synthetic polymers: 40% is fine, 5% is the absolute minimumand ensure the oil is to to API/SH or SJ spec BUT check the vehicle history! Retailers will NOT generally information about the percentage of synthetic polymer, so check the company website! The author has seen cars that ran perfectly well on semi-synthetic oil start to leak furiously from just about every joint, plug and seal in sight when changed to fully synthetic oil later in life! Expect to pay £15-40 depending on supplier.

Oil filters (use nothing but SAAB ones!) can be had for under £4.

Front brake pads (genuine) £32

Suspension swivel (ball) joint – expect to pay £10-12

Windscreen – sometimes available from £100

Pirelli 195/65/ZR tyre (£80 fitted and balanced from Fraser Auto Repairs, Sunderland)

Spark plug set (resistor plugs ONLY for Direct ignition) £8. Use only NGK!

Air filter: £12 (genuine SAAB)

Water pump (pattern) for 2 litre Turbo: £29

Top radiator hose for 9000 V6: £12 (Genuine SAAB)

ZF automatic gearbox filter kit: £23

Air conditioning radiator (condenser) £151

Air conditioning service (re-gas with 900 units R134a refrigerant and leak test) £65 + VAT

Ultimately, SAAB parts are really no dearer than from other prestige makes and the many specialists that advertise in the Owners Club Magazine provide both OE and good quality alternatives at reasonable prices. Do remember to factor in VAT and carriage charges (where applicable) so prices may be compared on a 'like for like' basis

3.4 Insurance

Body panels are quite expensive and pattern parts do not seem to be available. Coupled with the performance, drivers under 25 may encounter steep premiums when trying to insure turbos. As with all vehicles, it pays to shop around and it is thought that the SAAB Owners Club has arranged special terms for owners.

3.5 Will it fit your garage? Will it tow a caravan? Can I fit a roof rack?

Before purchasing a car, it is worthwhile knowing whether it will fit within the family garage. Lengths of 9000 variants vary slightly, with CD saloon variants being slightly longer than hatches. Figures below are for the 1992 CD saloon and are for general guidance only:

Length	4780mm
Width	1806mm
Height	1420mm
Weight	1960Kg
Max trailer weight	1600Kg (WITH brakes)

Luggage capacity is impressive, even with the rear seats up (22 Cubic feet) but in the case of the hatchback, it is quite easy to fit a mountain bicycle, without removing the wheels when the seats are lowered (56.5 cubic feet). Hatches are more versatile load carriers than saloons, purely because the 60/40 split rear seat offers more possible combinations of load and passengers. Of course, a roof rack may be fitted to the 9000 - the mountings are concealed beneath the rubber draught excluder strip that runs along the top of the door frame where the aperture meets the roof. Such items are pricey accessories but good used roof racks do appear both in the advertising columns of periodicals and within the automotive sections of web sites like eBay (www.ebay.co.uk).

For towing, the author recommends the purchase of at least a light pressure turbo-charged car. It should be pointed out that the additional weight will impose a load on the transmission. This has implications for cars fitted with automatic transmission in that care must be taken to ensure the Dexron 2 fluid is changed very regularly.

The mad 9000 enthusiast is a self-confessed car nut who has spent the last quarter of a century playing with a variety of Aston Martins, Porsches, Rolls-Royces and Mk 2 Jaguars. Interest in the 9000 as a breed was aroused after observing the high percentage of surviving older cars with few rust problems. Add strength, performance and build quality for a car that really should be regarded in higher esteem. Now, more cars than should be admitted to for a sane individual, have been purchased, run and in some cases, stripped to a bare shell.