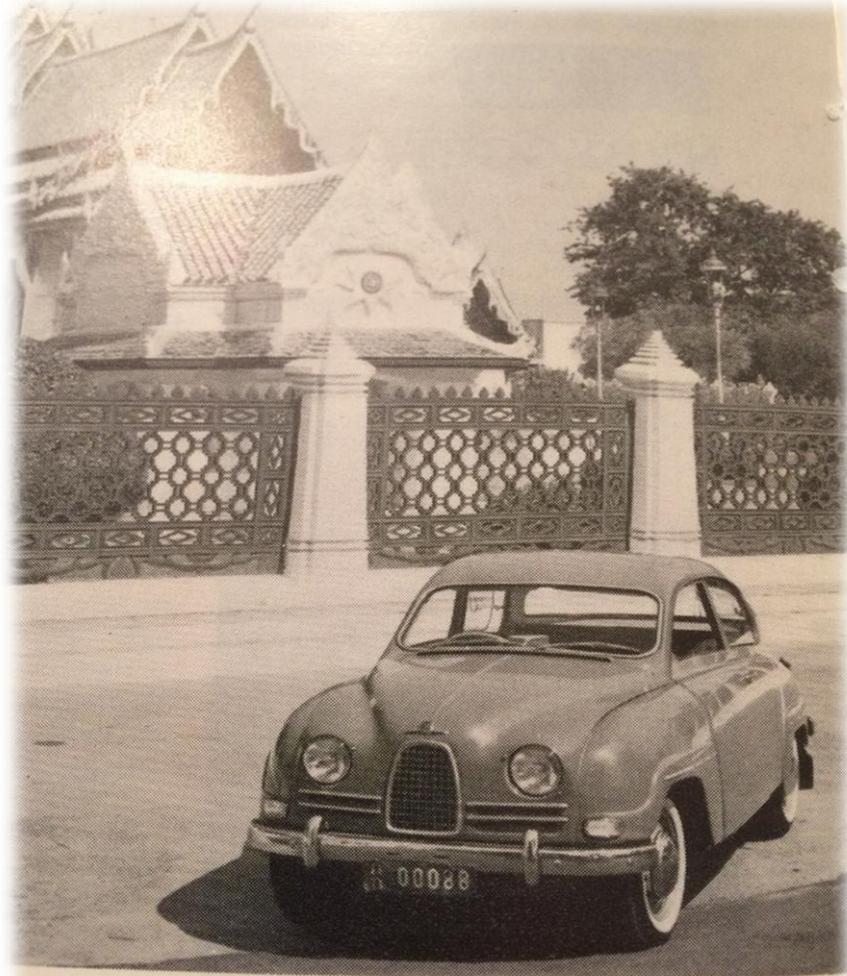


HISTORICAL SAAB / Source: VIPS\* 1961-1962, No3, Page 14.  
Photos and text by Lennart Cedrup.  
Translation / Additional text: Raymond Beaufoy, December 2018.

## SAAB IN SIAM



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*A Saab shown here outside Bangkok's most well-known temple "Wat Benchamabophit"- The marble temple.*

Fifteen to twenty years ago Siam's capital city Bangkok was known for its dirty canals and stagnant waterways - in many respects an unpleasant and unhealthy place to reside but for the city's mosquitos a sheer paradise!

Something had to be done and a transformation program began. Canals were either filled over with concrete to make way for new paths and roadways and the inner city redesigned and modern buildings built. Bangkok is planned to be transformed into a modern city with which to live and visit.



*Road-works are being completed throughout the whole of Bangkok. The workforce being often young girls who can be seen here clearing clay and rubble with their bare hands in order to make way for the new road networks.*

In many parts of Bangkok, the waterways are used as a means of quick transport of goods and local services. The floating market with shops, chemists, and cafes is one of Bangkok's, if not Asia's, most foremost tourist attractions.



*There are still many crowded canals and waterways in Bangkok, and many of the primitive bridges are a long way from suitable for Saab traffic,*

After the civil war the classic manpowered 'Rickshaw' taxis were converted to pedal driven Trishaws and then motorized driven 3-wheel Samlongs soon after followed.



*A Saab can be seen driving majestically through on New Road in central Bangkok, one of the hazardous Sam long motor driven three-wheelers shown here alongside.*

The first car rolled into Bangkok in 1907 and once the local people had familiarised themselves with motorised transport, car sales steadily started to increase. In those days there were no import restrictions on new cars although the Ministry of Transport introduced road usage taxes and tariffs making car ownership expensive.

Today, many of the old canals have gone and have been replaced by busy roads i.e. Suriwongser, Sathorn, Silom etc. -and thanks to the foresight of the city's building planners, road travel throughout this busy city is reasonably good – further widening of the many narrow canal bridges is also currently underway.

### **Saab in Siam and the Monte Carlo Rally**

Saab became established in Bangkok about a year ago and to give the initial introduction a much-welcomed boost, Erik Carlsson magnificently won the Monte Carlo Rally! We at SS Motors got off to a very good start! The company's 43-year-old owner and Saab driver and motoring enthusiast Sampow Sirisambhand, considers the Saab to be a comfortable and spacious car and nice to drive - Sampow is a successful businessman and his company is one of Bangkok's largest.

In addition to SS Motors, he owns SS Marina, which sells Säfte engines and Christ Crafts yachts and boats. He owns also SS Fisheries which, amongst many other things, are involved in the cultivation of pearls.



*Brothers Armorn and Sampow Sirisambhand outside the Saab Showroom on the Bangkok-Smutprakarn Road 217.*

The brothers also own SS Construction, a building company that's currently involved in building a new marine Police headquarters at an estimated cost of 35 million Tikal (approx. 10 M\$ek - 1kr =4 Tikal).

The Sirisambhand brothers explained that they have had many good trade relations with Swedish companies and when Saab showed interest in doing business with us, we gladly jumped at the chance, we are now Saabs General Agent for Siam.

Before the first cars started to arrive my brother and I took the chance to visit Trollhättan in Sweden and spent a month or so there learning how Saab cars are manufactured and serviced.

In order to stimulate sales SS Motors also advertise on TV at a cost of 1000 Tikal / minute in- between programs. Even the local radio-stations and newspapers include adverts for Saab.

A recent road test published in the Bangkok World newspaper has shown that the Saab is ideally suited for this city and surrounding areas, we have a full page of advertising dedicated to Saab in each Sunday issue of the Bangkok World. Its readers are now familiar with what a Saab car looks like!

For the time being we are reasonably satisfied with our sales figures when considering the high competition that exists between individual car manufacturers throughout Siam. We are not expecting any huge profits from this side of our business for a good while.

Here new car prices are rather high - A 55% customs duty is added to the price we pay to Saab and a further 22 % is added for the CIF-value\* – this was previously paid upon the initial sale of the car but more recently it has been changed and is now included for every car imported into the country. Such high taxes certainly do not help us as a business!

The total price to new customers should be somewhere in the region of 65 000 Tikal but in order to get the car on to the market here we are selling it for 58 000 Tikal.

Saab owners really appreciate the cars styling with its sleek body lines -The Siamese people are very fond of fine art and beauty. The cars colour is also very important - Black cars are not popular here due to the heat they absorb.

Two-door variants are normally quite difficult to sell here too - most people who can afford to buy a new car also have their own driver – cars having four-doors are naturally those which people buy most. The Saabs low running costs, local service and availability of spare part are our company's ingredients for success.

In Siam gasoline costs 1.84 Tikal (about 40 öre) and 2,08 Tikal for high octane fuel. Road tax costs 400 Tikal and a new driving licence 26 Tikal.

As sales outside of Bangkok are relatively low, Sampo Sirisamband intends keeping his office in Bangkok although this may shortly change when the negotiations are finalised of a further sales outlet in Chiang Mai, Siam's second largest city.

### **Test-drive of Saab by motoring journalist.**

The Saab performed admirably on the roads surrounding Bangkok. The journalist drove the car 180 km to Khao Yai and after an early start managed to return to see the setting sun in Bangkok the same evening. The illustrated article and road test report has given Saab a strong marketing boost.

Siam's road network is still under development although one can drive from Bangkok to Rangoon and the border into Burma. In an eastward direction to Cambodia and to the North its 800 km to Chiang Mai although the roads here are very narrow, about 70–80 % are surfaced and mostly straight - such a drive would take about 10–12 hours in a Saab. A drive south via Kuala Lumpur and on to Singapore can be made on excellent road surfaces,

### **Car-rallies and competitions in Siam**

As yet we do not have any motoring clubs and organisations in Siam but with all the recent rally success achieved by Saab this is bound to quickly change.

\*Cost, Insurance and Freight (CIF) means the seller pays costs, freight, and insurance against the buyer's risk of loss or damage in transit to the destination.