2006 SAAB 9-5 COMBISPORT

The Saab 9-5 2006 features a series of changes this year. Over 1,100 modifications have been made affecting its appearance, suspension, steering, instrument panel, and sound system, among other things. The line has also been simplified with the disappearance of the Linear, Arc and Aero models, leaving only a single version available in a sedan or a wagon—the CombiSport. The only engine available is the 260 horsepower, four cylinder 2.3 litre turbo.

**Interior and trunk**

Getting in is easy even though the vehicle is a little low. In the front, the sports seats are very comfortable for people with a frame that fits between the large front lateral supports, but larger passengers will be more comfortable in the basic seats. The driving position is very good, but the wheel for the lumbar support is on the exterior side of the seat and is slightly difficult to reach.

The rear bench seats two adults comfortably. Head and leg room are very good. The seatback folds down 60/40 to form a flat surface that creaked in our trial vehicle.

The cargo hold is generous with the seatbacks in place and enormous with the seatbacks folded down. The cargo cover is made of rigid cardboard that is divided into three sections. The last two fold into the first, leaving a good 38 cm that stick out. Why not use retractable webbing like they do in the 9-3 and competing family models in order to free up as much space as possible? With the 9-5’s system, you have to remove the cargo cover if you need all the space up to the seat. Plus, the rear of the vehicle has a significant frontward slant so the last 40 cm of cargo space at the rear can’t be used to its full height.

Photo: SAAB
Convenience and Safety

The interior is very well finished and made with quality materials, but the soundproofing could be fine-tuned for wind and road noises. Total storage capacity is disappointing. The cup holders cannot accommodate every size. The horn only works if the ignition key is in the "ON" position.

Speaking of the ignition key, it’s about time Saab quit confusing everybody with the placement of the ignition. In this case, it’s on the floor between the two seats, which is unusual, to say the least. You also have to place the manual shift lever in reverse to remove the key, which is another manoeuvre we could easily live without. Obviously, you get used to it, but for a company as safety conscious as Saab, the positioning of the ignition raises a few objections. First—and Saab itself warns us about this—the placement makes it vulnerable to spills and infiltration of materials like sand, dust, and even “salted” snow. Second, a cheeky passenger could be tempted to turn it off since the key is easier to reach than when it is on the steering column or the instrument panel. The key chain rests on the base of the ignition, becoming a source of noise and an obstacle hindering access to the power window controls. Finally, more often than not, when shifting into Neutral, Reverse, or Park, the sleeve of your coat or jacket gets snagged on the key.

The instruments and controls are well placed, but the controls on the steering wheel and those for the mirrors do not light up. The computer can’t simultaneously display exterior temperature and another function, which isn’t particularly impressive. The air conditioning is slow and you have to adjust it to 18\(^\circ\)C to get what most vehicles provide at 20\(^\circ\)C. The rear wiper has no intermittent setting, which is disappointing in a vehicle with this price tag.

When you exit the vehicle, you can’t lock it using the command on the driver’s side door. You have to use the remote. Also, the hatchback doesn’t unlock when you unlock the doors and you have to use the remote or the command on the driver’s side door.

For safety, the 9-5 relies on six inflatable airbags, active headrests in the front, four ABS disc brakes, an anti-skid system, very good visibility in all directions, large exterior mirrors, and good headlights. None of the five headrests adjust high enough for taller passengers.

In U.S. government tests, the 9-5 earned five out of five stars for front passenger safety in case of frontal impact. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety rated the 9-5 “good”—its highest rating—for driver safety in case of offset frontal impact. For side and rear impact, it earned the second best rating—“acceptable”. 
**Engine and transmission**

The 2.3 litre four cylinder turbo delivers 260 horsepower—ten more than last year—and 258 pounds of torque to provide lively acceleration and pickup. Starting at 1,900 rpm, when torque reaches its maximum, accelerations are linear and progressive, but you still have to watch out for the effect of the torque during rapid acceleration on bumpy surfaces or while turning.

The five speed automatic transmission is so consistently smooth that you barely notice the gears changing. In manual, the changes are more noticeable. You can start in second or third gear.

**On the road**

The 9-5 offers a very smooth ride on nearly all surfaces. On some bumps, though, the 45-profile tires and the sports package’s firmer suspension are almost stiff. Otherwise, reactions are firm, but not excessive. The vehicle handles very well and really grips the pavement. We should mention that with the sports package, the vehicle is 1 cm lower. Solidity is fairly impressive, but not as much as in a Volvo. Sometimes the suspension makes a bit of noise, especially up front.

The power steering is a little heavy at low speeds, but nicely calibrated otherwise. It’s quick, precise, and stable. It provides some road feel and has a short turn radius. The four disc brakes are powerful and resist fading.

Inspection at a CAA-Québec Technical Inspection Centre revealed that the 9-5 is well-built, with a robust underbody that is well protected against rust. The windshield washer fluid reservoir is on the left, which is not the normal side, and the lower part of it is exposed. The emergency brake’s rather archaic rear mechanism leads us to believe that it would seize fairly easily.

**Conclusion**

The 9-5 CombiSport is both practical and fun to drive because of its excellent handling and engine. On the practical side, though, Saab should pay attention to what the competition—specifically Mazda and Volvo—is doing. Behind the wheel, though, you can easily overlook certain minor irritants and smile as the kilometres roll by.

**PROS:** smooth, powerful engine, smooth automatic transmission, comfortable seats, handling, standard equipment, visibility.

**CONS:** less-than-perfect soundproofing, ignition on the floor, unlit controls, insufficient storage space, impractical cargo cover, some functions and controls should be overhauled.
**SAAB 9-5 2006**

**Engine:** 16-valve, 2.3-litre; turbo; 4-cylinder  
**Horsepower:** 260 hp at 5,300 rpm  
**Torque:** 258 lb-ft from 1,900 to 4,000 rpm  
**Transmission:** 5-speed manual; 5-speed automatic  
**Suspension:** fully independent  
**Brakes:** disc/disc  
**Wheelbase:** 270.3 cm  
**Length:** 483.6 cm (SW: 484.1 cm)  
**Width:** 179.2 cm  
**Height:** 144.8 cm (SW: 145.9 cm)  
**Weight:** 1,565 to 1,730 kg  
**Tires:** P235/45R17  
**Maximum towing capacity:** 1,588 kg  
**Airbags:** dual front, plus two side and two curtain

**Fuel consumption with automatic transmission:**  
Transport Canada rating:  
- City 13.3 L/100 km (21 mpg)  
- Highway 8.3 L/100 km (34 mpg)  
- Test result: 10.5 L/100 km (27 mpg)  
- Test temperature: 12°C to 27°C

**Fuel tank capacity:** 70 litres

**Fuel requirement:** premium gasoline

**Acceleration:**  
- 0–100 km/h: 7.4 seconds  
- 60–100 km/h: 5.5 seconds

**Competition:** Infiniti G35, Jaguar X-Type, Lexus ES 350, Volvo S60/V70

**Warranty:**  
- Full basic coverage: 4 years/80,000 km  
- Powertrain: 4 years/80,000 km  
- Surface corrosion: 4 years/80,000 km  
- Perforation damage: 6 years/unlimited km  
- Emissions control system: 4 years/80,000 km (full coverage); 8 years/130,000 km (catalytic converter, electronic control module).

**Factory replacement parts:**  
- Rear bumper: $1,066  
- Front brake disc: $231  
- Brake pads: $184  
- Muffler: $790  
- Front fender: $454 (left); $471 (right)
Average insurance premium (Quebec City, replacement cost endorsement, claim-free insurance record, male or female driver 30 to 40 years old): $866 to $1,209

Price according to trim level:
- Sedan: $43,000
- CombiSport: $44,500

Main options:
- Visibility Package: $1,700
- Sport Package: $200
- Automatic transmission: $1,500
- Navigation system: $3,495

Price as tested: $50,725

Freight and preparation: $1,180

Dealers: Quebec: 17  Canada: 46

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