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Volvo XC90 – Road Test

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DIESEL POWER STILL THE MOST POPULAR FOR THE VOLVO XC90 LARGE SUV...

...for good reasons, says David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).



The second generation Volvo XC90 large SUV with 4×4 traction and seven seats is the flagship of the revitalised Volvo range. It was introduced in 2014 and recently it has undergone its mid-term revisions to keep it relevant in today's expanding SUV market sector.

It was the sales and image success of the premium brand XC90 that led Volvo to producing similar in style the XC60 mid-sized SUV and more recently the even more popular XC40 and that model range sees an all-electric version become available next year. They all use Volvo's SPA (Scalable Product Architecture) and being Volvos they major on their leading safety technologies and driving safety support systems as we move towards autonomous driving.

Since the introduction of the XC family of SUVs and the alternative new generation saloons and estates in the S90/V90 and S60 and V60 ranges, and with a replacement due for the V40 family hatchback, Volvo has increased its sales and profitability remarkably with a global 12% growth in 2018 and another 8.1% global growth for the first 10 months of this year. That growth is replicated in the UK with a 9% growth last year to 50,319 registrations, the brand's highest annual sales volume in 28 years, and the story gets better with a 14.3% increase in registrations for the first 10 months of this year with over 48,000 new cars sold so far.

Although it's not Volvo's current best selling model range, because of its size and price, the XC90 is very much the flag-bearer for the Chinese Geely conglomerate owned Scandinavian brand. And contrary to the downturn in popularity of diesel powered vehicles it is the diesel models that are the most popular XC90 versions. The XC90 range has a 50/50 sales split in the UK between fleet and retail customers.



There are petrol, diesel and petrol-electric plug-in hybrid power options in the UK line-up and all are AWD (4-wheel drive) models with automatic transmissions. The engines are all 2.0 litre, four cylinder units and comprise of the B5 235, 480 Nm (354 lb.ft) turbodiesel, the T5 250 hp 350 Nm (258 lb.ft) turbo petrol, the T6 310 hp, 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) turbo petrol and the T8 Twin Engine PHEV with a 303 hp petrol engine and an 87 hp electric motor driving the rear wheels. Because of its low CO2 emissions of 52-55 g/km this model only incurs a 19% benefit-in-kind tax rate for company car drivers against the 37% for the other diesel/petrol powered models. However this year's stopping of the £3,500 grant off the purchase price by the Government on all PHEVs has seen their sales fall considerably.

So figures from Volvo regarding the XC90 show that 60% of customers buy a diesel model, 10% buy a T5 petrol model, just 5% buy a T6 petrol version and the T8 Twin Engine PHEV still appeals to 20% of UK customers.



The specification levels are wide ranging but all are impressively equipped. These start with Momentum - the choice of 15% of customers, Momentum Pro 10%, R-Design 25%, R-Design Pro 15%, Inscription 15% and Inscription Pro at 20%.

So it just so happened that my latest XC90 model was the best selling version overall - the B5 235 hp turbodiesel with R-Design specification priced at £56,935. The 20 model XC90 range overall has prices ranging from £53,085 for the T5 petrol Momentum up to £71,945 for the T8 Twin Engine PHEV Inscription Pro. Of course there is a wide range of extra cost options and option packs that will increase those prices considerably.

All engines in the X90 range are what Volvo call their Drive-E units constructed of lightweight aluminium. The new B5 235 hp turbodiesel unit with 480 Nm (354 lb.ft) of torque uniquely in the range of XC90 engines now has a 48 volt mild-hybrid function with KERS kinetic energy recovery system including an integrated starter-generator motor. The system harvests power during braking and de-acceleration into a battery before that power is released again to assist with acceleration, improving driveability and response at low speeds, and reducing emissions as well as providing faster, quieter starting of the engine in its Stop/Start operation.



Depending on the vehicle's specification level, CO2 emissions range from 154 to 156 g/km with a Combined Cycle fuel consumption figure range of 37.7 to 44.1 mpg. During my week of driving covering all types of roads and traffic conditions, but no off-road driving, the real-life overall figure was 36.5 mpg. This was a little less than the official figures but much better than my colleague recently obtained from his test drive of the new XC90 T6 petrol model which returned an average 26.7 mpg with high CO2 emissions and equally expensive tax costs.

The B5 turbodiesel performance is brisk and responsive with a top speed of 137 mph and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is 7.6 seconds, which for a 2.0 litre turbodiesel engine



in such a large seven-seat AWD vehicle with an eight speed automatic gearbox is impressive. There are of course the usual selectable driving modes and most of my motoring was done in Eco mode, and without any sluggish issues due to the high engine torque and mild-hybrid system output. On the demerit side I found the diesel unit sounded a little harsh in tone and I say this because it so happened that as I stepped out of my new 2.0 litre turbodiesel Range Rover Evoque with its 240 hp unit and into the XC90 2.0 litre diesel, the noise level intrusion into the cabin was noticeably higher. That said after the initial journey during the following days of use the brashness of the Volvo unit didn't detract from its performance - familiarity I suppose, it's what you get used to.

Handling felt safe and secure, if not that agile given the vehicle's size and weight, and it is not able to match the handling refinement or the surefootedness of its rival BMW X5 for example. Other competitors include the Land Rover Discovery which is a supreme off-road performer, as is its Range Rover equivalent. The Audi Q7 is probably an equal match to the XC90 range. The steering provided a reasonable amount of feedback but the ride quality suffered on potholed road surfaces due to the larger 20-inch alloy wheels used for the R-Design specification. There was also more road-rumble noise intrusion than ideal.



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The seats however are huge and hugely comfortable and supportive and the overall cabin appearance and layout is one of 'plushness' – Scandi Chic as we have come to term it. The XC90 is a true family-wagon with three rows of seats accommodating up to seven passengers.



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The second and third row seats fold individually to extend the load space to 1,856 litres (65.54 cu.ft). With all seven seats in use there is a boot space of a minimum 302 litres (10.67 cu.ft).



Key features for all XC90 models include a Sensus touchscreen with voice activated control, 12.3-inch driver's information display, power operated tailgate, LED headlights, rear parking camera, sat-nav, Volvo On-Call connected services, keyless entry and turn-button start and a data SIM card. Being a Volvo there are extensive safety features including City Safety with automatic emergency braking and Steering Support, Oncoming Lane Mitigation, Run-Off Road Mitigation and Protection and of course extensive airbags throughout. The additions provided by the best selling R-Design spec level include sports seats with leather upholstery, sports leather steering wheel, sports pedals, high-gloss mesh front grille and 20-inch wheels.

Whilst the visual changes to the XC90 are minimal, so it doesn't date the outgoing generation, as sales of diesel powered versions still reign supreme for the XC90, the most



noticeable improvement is adding the 48v mild-hybrid support to the diesel power unit. Previously it was called a D5 engine, now it's a B5 unit reflecting on its hybrid/battery function and it's all the better for it. Whilst it is not exactly cheap it is far less costly than going to the PHEV plug-in hybrid T8 petrol-electric model which costs £10k more for the same spec level - although of course running costs and taxes are much lower.





VERDICT

Whatever the model choice the Volvo XC90 is a fine, roomy, classy and practical large SUV with a proven sales record for those wanting a fashionable SUV styled family-wagon. A proper MPV large people carrier would be less expensive and even more practical but less appealing for the must-have SUV global army of modern-day customers.

For: Proven desirability and eager customers in its seven seat large SUV premium market sector, classy high quality interior, roomy, comfortable seats, strong new mild-hybrid turbodiesel engine, good fuel economy potential.



Against: Costly and high tax penalties due to its price and diesel fuel levies, road noise intrusion and firm ride over some road surfaces, ungenerous warranty.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

New Volvo XC90 B5 diesel, AWD, R-Design, seven seat SUV.

Price: £56,935.

Engine/transmission: B5 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbodiesel with a 48v mild-hybrid support system, 235 hp, 480 Nm (354 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, eight speed-automatic gearbox with AWD.



Performance: 137 mph, 0-62 mph 7.6 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 37.7 to 44.1 mpg (36.5 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 154 g/km, diesel rate First Year VED road tax £855 then £145 Standard rate + £310 five years annual supplement as it costs over £40k, BiK diesel rate company car tax 37%.

Insurance Group: 38E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,953 mm (16.25 ft), W 2,008 mm (6.59 ft), H 1,776 mm (5.83 ft), wheelbase 2,984 mm (9.79 ft), boot/load space 302 to 1,856 litres (10.67 to 65.54 cu.ft), braked towing weight 2,700 kg (5,952 lb), five doors/seven seats.