Latest Volvo S90 D5 AWD executive saloon – Road Test

Published: December 8, 2017

Author: David Miles

Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/latest-volvo-s90-d5-awd-executive-saloon-road-test/

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) test-drives the 2018 VOLVO S90 D5 AWD executive saloon.

Volvo’s premium brand executive S90 four door large saloons and V90 estates, 2WD/AWD models, came to market in September 2016 and this was followed earlier this year by AWD D4/D5 Cross Country V90 estates and the T8 Twin Engine plug-in hybrid petrol/electric powertrain for both the S90 and V90 ranges.

And it’s just been announced that S90/V90 models are to gain a T4 190 hp turbo petrol engine and automatic transmission to accommodate any possible move by customers away from diesel power to petrol.

For the 2018 model year the range is now complete and it also includes the addition of the sporty specification R-Design level for both body types. The complete specification line up is Momentum, Momentum Pro, R-Design, R-Design Pro, Inscription and Inscription Pro. When it comes to engine choices, depending on the spec level chosen, the range now offers 2.0T turbo petrol 190 hp, 2.0 litre D4 190 hp 2WD and D5 235 hp 2.0 litre PowerPulse AWD turbodiesel units and the petrol/electric 2.0-litre T8 Twin Engine Hybrid 320+87 hp AWD. All models have an eight-speed automatic transmission as standard. Also available from Volvo's tuning division – Polestar – is a Performance Optimisation package for the D5 unit costing £835. This increases power/torque outputs to 240 hp/500 Nm (369 lb.ft) but gives sharper engine and gearshift responses.

Some prices have just been increased so for the S90 saloon they start at £34,465 and rise to £57,705 for the Hybrid model with the top level spec. The V90 estates cost £2,000 more than their equivalent saloon model. Of course there is a huge range of extra cost options and packs that will push the price up much further.

As an example I have just tried the S90 D5 PowerPulse AWD R-Design automatic priced at £43,165 on the road but fitted with an array of options this test version cost £54,335. Some of the heavy cost options were the £1,800 Xenium Pack which includes a glass tilt and slide sunroof, automatic parking and a 360-degree parking camera. The Winter Pack with heated front windscreen, heated steering wheel, heated washer nozzles and headlight cleaning systems added another £525 to the price. The premium Bowers and Wilkins sound system costs £3,000 and the Active Four adaptive suspension system which includes rear electronic air suspension costs another £1,500 – but is well worth it given the sporting ride nature of the R-Design specification.

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The options list is extensive and complies with the personalisation requirements of the buyers who frequent the premium brand large saloon and estate market sector. The S90's main competitors are the Audi A6, BMW 5 Series, Jaguar XF and Mercedes E-Class saloons

and the V90 will compete against the estate versions of those models which now include the new Jaguar XF Sportbrake available with 2WD and 4WD variants.

The S90/V90 are the latest models after the new XC90 SUV to be built on Volvo's scalable product architecture where the only fixed point is the distance from fascia to mid-point front axle and all other measurements are varied to suit the particular car.

Whereas previous top of the range Volvo saloons and estates have adopted a boxy design for maximum interior practical passenger and load carrying abilities, the new S90/V90 models are far more elegant. They feature sleek styling lines outside and a classy interior, with clean premium Scandinavian design incorporating leather upholstery and a variety of light wood or aluminium trim inserts. All models have Volvo's Sensus operating system of driving aids as well as the latest in connectivity functions.

Sensus includes semi-autonomous drive technology as standard to make operating easier and safer. This takes care of the steering, accelerator and automatic braking at up to 80 mph to keep the car within the required lane and at a set speed and no longer requires a lead vehicle to follow. Sensus also includes large animal detection warning and run-off road mitigation. It is also the umbrella for intuitive infotainment, including a nine-inch vertical touch screen, a voice control system and integration of Apple CarPlay – which is an extra cost option.

Standard equipment is comprehensive and some of the highlights are the Sensus system (which also includes City Safe warning and braking), active beam LED headlights, two-zone climate control, power operated tailgate, power operated split and fold rear seats and headrests, 17-inch alloy wheels, eight-inch crystal driver info screen, leather upholstery, heated front seats, electric windows and folding door mirrors.

And so the specification increases as we move up the range. I tested the S90 D5 PowerPluse AWD automatic saloon with the new the R-Design specification which adds such items as contoured sports seats with leather and Nubuck upholstery, LED foglights with cornering

function, a 12.3-inch TFT crystal driver's information display screen, metal mesh trim inlays, dual integrated exhaust pipes, 18-inch alloy wheels, perforated leather covered steering wheel with gearshift paddles, sports pedals, sports suspension and rear footwell and front/rear side step illumination.

The important feature of a premium quality large executive saloon is interior space and comfort. The overall length is almost five-metres (over 16 feet) with a width of 1,895 mm (6.22 ft) but it's got a lower roofline than previous big Volvo saloons at 1,443 mm (4.73 ft) so headroom for the tallest rear seat passengers is snug. Most importantly it has a long 2,941 mm (9.65 ft) wheelbase to provide that extra rear seat legroom and there is a 500 litre (17.66 cu.ft) boot to accommodate that expensive luggage. Potentially you could carry three adults in the rear but the R-Design contoured rear seats are more suitable for two adults.

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Overall the interior is really classy and comfortable, you feel cosseted in a safe environment and even long journeys were not tiring. The ride was comfortable and the suspension compliant, certainly not as unforgiving as the Audi A6 or BMW 5 Series. And there is the choice of driving modes, Comfort, Dynamic and Eco. Comfort I used most of the time, Dynamic hardly at all – it's not that sort of a saloon – and Eco I selected for motorway cruising. As for the driving functions they were all laid out in a logical manner. I have complained before with other brands about too many controls for important functions being contained within a touchscreen system. The tablet style portrait controls numerous functions as well as the sat-nav and sound system but there are short-cut buttons for such things as the temperature controls, which made life easier and a little safer than scrolling through sub-menus to find the right operating mode.

As for driving dynamics? The German competitors feel more tied-down when it comes to handling. The Volvo S90 wafts along which was not unpleasant and a darn-sight more comfortable, providing the right mode was selected and that is where the extra cost adjustable dampers and air-suspension option is worthwhile. Yes it does dull the sharpness

of the handling but in real terms it’s a better option than a tiring rock-hard ride. Despite its size the S90 felt reasonably agile and the steering trustworthy.

I know Volvo place great importance on driving support and safety functions but I found the Pilot Assist semi autonomous steering intrusive at times, especially on motorways. The steering sensors use the painted lines to keep you on the straight and narrow. I found the S90 too eager not to change lanes as the steering firms up too much for my liking to keep the car straight ahead and the warning vibration kicks in when you are leaving the motorway lane it thinks you need to be in. On normal roads the steering had a heavy straight ahead tendency as well and its Dynamic setting made this heavier still without offering any more feedback to the driver. Autonomous driving is coming and Volvo says their cars will be fully autonomous by 2021 with trials starting in London next year as part of their Drive Me global preparation programme – so best we get used to it.

The 2.0 litre D5 PowerPulse 235 hp turbodiesel engine is one of Volvo’s own Drive-E units. Like the lower powered D4 unit it has two turbochargers that work sequentially to provide responsive power at low and high revs. But the D5 also uses Volvo’s PowerPulse system which injects compressed air from a self generating source stored in a tank in the engine bay. This injects air into the path of the first turbocharger, like a supercharger, to get it spinning when it would be idle, such as very low engine revs. This provides for immediate response as soon as you press the accelerator. With 480 Nm (354 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm the grunt is impressive and provides torque right through a very broad powerband. Top speed is 145 mph and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is just 7.0 seconds. The eight-speed auto gearbox gives seamless changes throughout the acceleration range with no ‘snatches’ between gears during hard acceleration but in Eco mode there is a ‘coasting’ function to save fuel – but there was a noticeable ‘clunk’ when it deactivated as the power was applied again. The AWD traction is of real-life benefit during the winter months in mud, ice or snow conditions. The AWD facility is also beneficial for towing duties and this D5 saloon can tow a trailer, caravan or boat of up to 2,200 kg (4,850 lb).

As for running costs the Combined Cycle official figure is 58.9 mpg but even with some

longer motorway journeys at 70 mph mixed with my usual country road driving and some limited amount of in-town travel, the real-life figure was a disappointing 38.8 mpg. I say disappointing because the official figure is much higher, but in reality the figure my test drive returned for a saloon of this size and performance was realistically quite good. With CO2 emissions of 127 g/km, VED road tax VED road tax is £160 for the First Year rate and then £140 Standard rate but as the car costs over £40k you have to add to that last figure a £310 supplement for five years. Company car drivers will pay 27% Benefit-in-Kind tax. Insurance is Group 33E and warranty is three years and 60,000 miles, which is not that generous.

VERDICT

The Volvo S90 is a commendable alternative to the premium German brands in the executive saloon car market and certainly a more niche option than its now common-place competitors.

For: Premium brand saloon kerb appeal, classy and beautifully styled interior, high safety spec, compliant ride, plentiful rear seat legroom, strong and responsive engine.

Against: Real-life test drive fuel economy didn’t get close to the official Combined Cycle figure, semi autonomous steering can be intrusive on motorways and ‘heavily weighted’ for the straight-ahead at other times, not a very generous mileage limit for the warranty, expensive array of extra cost options.

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

Volvo S90 D5 PowerPulse AWD R-Design automatic saloon.

Price: £43,165 (£54,335 as tested).

Engine/transmission: D5 2.0 litre, PowerPulse, four cylinder, turbodiesel 235 hp, 480 Nm (354 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, eight speed automatic, AWD.

Performance: 145 mph, 0–62 mph 7.0 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 58.9 mpg (38.8 mpg on test.

Emssions and taxation: CO2 127/km, VED road tax £160 and then £140 + £310 supplement for 5-years, BIK company car tax rate 27%.

Insurance Group: 33E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,963 mm (16.28 ft), W 1,895 mm (6.22 ft), H 1,443 mm (4.73 ft), boot space 500 litres (17.66 cu.ft), four doors/four to five seats.