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Latest Volvo V90 estate – Road Test

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Sporty looking D5 Powerpulse and R-Design model added to the Volvo V90 estate range...

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

Volvo has been producing big estate cars for over 60 years, having been established in 1927. And under their current ownership/partnership of the Chinese Geely Holding company since 2010, the premium Swedish brand now goes from strength to strength introducing high class, premium quality models. In 2016 their record global sales in over 100 countries were 534,332 cars, an increase of 6.2% over 2015.



In the UK their 2016 sales were a record 46,696 units, an increase of 7.5% over the previous year. For the first seven months of this year their UK sales are up again by 6.3%. Sales will be further boosted by the imminent arrival of their new XC60 mid-sized SUV and the later arrival of the just announced XC40 small SUV.

One of the more recent additions to the V90 estate line-up is the sportier specification R-Design level with its turbodiesel D5 PowerPulse engine, standard fit eight-speed automatic gearbox and AWD, priced at £44,865 and the model I am featuring here.

In the UK the V90 is also available with the choice of D4 diesel and T6 petrol engines plus the T8 petrol/electric plug-in hybrid Twin Engine variant. Some versions have 2WD and AWD as well as the higher riding Cross Country derivatives, depending on the powertrain chosen. Prices range from £35,865 to £59,705. Again depending on what power source is chosen and whether its 2WD or AWD traction, spec levels are Momentum, R-Design, Inscription and Cross Country, with an additional 'Pro' level for each of them.

Like its S90 saloon stablemate the V90 uses the same platform as Volvo's highly rated XC90 large SUV. Even though the R-Design sports specification is comprehensive there is a huge range of extra cost options and Packs that can be added. My test car showcased a number of these and finally weighed in at a huge £55,765 with the price built up by adding the Xenium Pack at £2,000 which provides a glass tilt/side sunroof, 360-degree parking camera with surround view and Park Assist Pilot providing automatic and parallel parking. There was the £375 Winter Pack, £600 Intellisafe Surround Pack with blind spot monitoring, steer assist, cross traffic alert and rear end collision mitigation. The Seat Pack costs £700 for power operated front seats with the driver's seat getting a memory function. One of the other options fitted was the £3,000 Sensus Connect facility which includes the superb Bowers and Wilkins audio system.

As always with safety in mind Volvo have fitted as standard their Pilot Assist system which operates at speeds up to 80 mph. This monitors steering, speed and the surroundings with radar and a camera to eliminate impacts and reduces the chance of the estate leaving the



road as it intervenes if required, all part of Volvo's move towards autonomous driving.



The new R-Design spec level offers a sportier styling and equipment theme similar to BMW's M-Sport and Mercedes AMG Line models, but not to be confused with the halo BMW M and Merc AMG full-blown high powered machines. We await Volvo's performance Polestar division to add their flair to the S90/V90 ranges. The R-Design level wasn't available when the Volvo S90 and V90 range was introduced last year.

The R-Design gives the V90 a sportier looking exterior with a black grille, a more prominent front bumper, larger 18-inch alloys, a stiffer sports suspension which is 15 mm (just over



half an inch) lower and retuned steering. The interior is upgraded with leather/nubuck sports seats, metal style fascia trim inserts, a new style steering wheel and bespoke ambient lighting. Centrepiece to the fascia is Volvo's tablet style pinch and zoom portrait touchscreen which controls many of the estate's operating functions. Too many basic functions in fact, such as the heating and ventilation system that annoyingly means the driver's eyes are taken away from observing the road to operate the system on-the-move; even what should be the simple task of adjusting the interior temperature. Given Volvo's history of making driving safe this is a retrograde step although in fairness there is a facility to operate the sat-nav, radio and temperature by voice if you feel inclined to fathom out its operation.

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Other than the touchscreen the controls are all user-friendly and the V90 estate with the new R-Design spec is a delight to spend time in, especially during long journeys. It's roomy in both the front and the rear and it's a practical load-lugger as well with 560 litres (19.78 cu.ft) of boot space and this goes up to 1,526 litres (53.89 cu.ft) with the rear power-operated seats folded. It has a power-operated wide tailgate with a low loading height, making it more convenient to load and unload cargo than a high-off-the-ground SUV. Being a Volvo estate it will continue its appeal as a tow car, with this D5 AWD variant having a braked towing weight of 2,200 kg (4,850 lb).

On the road the V90 estate is a large and impressive looking estate but although almost 5.0 metres (4.94 metres or 16.19 ft) in length, nearly 1.9 metres (6.2 feet) wide and with a kerb weight of 1,927 kg (4,248 lb) its bulkiness is not obvious, apart from finding a parking space.

The stiffer, lower suspension with revised damper settings provides a flat and level well-balanced ride, firm on occasions depending on the road surface (even in Comfort mode), it has precise cornering control, it's much tauter and with powerful braking. I'd like a bit more 'feel' from the steering, it's not too light – far from it, but it just felt numb during swift



cornering on country roads. Of course the AWD traction added significant stability during acceleration and cornering as the on-demand system shuffled grip to the wheels that needed it most. Having AWD will also improve the V90's all-weather performance, especially as it's coupled with the semi-autonomous driving control functions.



Although badged D5, like all V90s including the T8 Hybrid, the R-Design has a four cylinder engine. The D5 2.0 litre turbodiesel engine produces 235 hp, an extra 40 hp over the D4 engine. The D5 unit specifically uses PowerPulse technology which is essentially a tank of regenerative compressed air that boosts the initial power of the turbocharger, minimising turbo-lag giving a linear and strong supply of power during acceleration. With 480 Nm (354 lb.ft) of torque provided from 1,750 rpm the engine is very responsive and quick. It is also very smooth and quiet. Top speed is 145 mph but it's the zero to 62 mph acceleration time of just 7.2 seconds that's makes this big estate a 'hard-charger' when needed.



The fuel economy is impressive as well, not as good as the official EU Combined Cycle figure of 57.6 mpg but during my week of driving covering long and short runs the real-life figure was 43.2 mpg which for such a big, substantially built and equipped estate with AWD traction was very acceptable. With CO2 emissions of 129 g/km VED First Year road tax costs £160 reducing to the Standard rate of £140 but from year two onwards for five years the downside is that as this model costs more than £40k there is an added £310 annual supplement to pay.

VERDICT

This is a large premium class roomy estate with a strong and powerful engine plus AWD and



coupled with the sportier R-Design specification. It is a desirable proposition but it doesn't come cheap, especially if you delve into the extra cost options. Thankfully for Volvo there are drivers who will always pay more for 'pure class' especially if they want something a bit more exclusive than the volume selling Audi, BMW and Merc models in this sector.

For: Classy design inside and out, roomy, practical large load capacity, new sportier looking R-Sport spec level, strong and refined engine, smooth changing auto gearbox, taut handling, AWD grip.

Against: Expensive to buy if more specification options are added, firm ride over poorer road surfaces, too many most-used control functions are operated by the touchscreen.



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

Volvo V90 D5 PowerPulse AWD R-Design estate.

Price: £44,865 (£55,765 as tested).

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder, turbodiesel with PowerPulse compressed air boost, 235 hp, 480 Nm (354 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, eight speed automatic with manual mode, AWD traction.



Performance: 145 mph, 0 to 62 mph 7.2 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 57.6 mpg (43.2 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 129 g/km, VED road tax £160 then £140 + £310 supplement for five years, BiK company car tax 27%.

Insurance Group: 33E.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,936 mm (16.19 ft), W 1,895 mm (6.22 ft), H 1,475 mm (4.84 ft), boot/load space 560–1,526 litres (19.78 – 53.89 cu.ft), braked towing weight 2,200 kg (4,850 lb), five doors/five seats.