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Volvo S60 – Road Test

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In five years the Swedish Volvo premium brand has more or less completely transformed its range of vehicles from roomy but solidly built conservatively styled models appealing to older buyers to a dynamic range of SUVs, estates and saloons with much more kerb appeal, whilst retaining their high safety reputation.

The latest new model is the S60 mid-sized four door saloon range, in essence a saloon version of the highly rated V60 estate. Prices start from £37,920 or £299 a month with a PCP contract and the same amount for a PCH hire contract.



The third generation Volvo S60 enters a tough premium brand market sector where its competitor models include the BMW 3 Series, Audi A4, Mercedes-Benz C-Class and Jaguar XE, with the Lexus IS and Alfa Romeo Giulia being alternative niche choices and of course the all-electric Tesla Model 3 has just started to arrive in the UK.

When deliveries of the USA built Volvo S60 saloon started to arrive in the UK in May the first version was the 250 hp petrol T5 FWD R-Design Edition with its standard eight speed automatic transmission. But already the UK price list shows an extended 250 hp petrol model line up with a T5 R-Design Plus at £37,935 and a T5 Inscription Plus model priced at £38,835.

But the latest extended range doesn't stop there as there is a petrol T8 Twin Engine Plug-In Hybrid with a 303 + 87 hp R-Design Plus version with an automatic gearbox and AWD priced at £49,805 and a Polestar Engineered Plug-In Hybrid T8 AWD auto with 318 + 87 hp priced at £56,105. Notably despite the S60 selling into what is mainly a market sector dominated by demand from high mileage business user-chooser and fleet customers, no diesel engine is available, all versions have as a core propulsion unit a 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbocharged petrol engine, and even the T8 AWD versions with their rear axle powered by an electric motor.



My test version was the S60 T5 FWD R-Design Edition priced at £37,920 but with added options the total cost was £41,195. That breaks the £40k price barrier so a customer would end up paying an extra £310 VED road tax supplement from year two onwards for five years in addition to the £145 Standard rate cost. With CO2 emissions of 155 g/km the First Year VED costs £530 and company car drivers will pay 35% Benefit-in-Kind tax.

So tax wise it pays to carefully select from the wide range of options available but the standard specification is high anyway. The options fitted to my test car were the power folding split rear seat backrest at £400, the power operated tilt and slide panoramic sunroof at £1,200, 20-inch alloy wheels with 235/40 tyres at £850, a spare wheel and jack at £150 plus metallic paint at £675.



To showcase the S60 saloon the range was launched in the UK in this R-Design Edition sporty interpretation with high specification. It has lowered sports suspension and a set of striking 19-inch alloy wheels with a contrast diamond cut and black finish. In the cabin, the heated sports front seats are upholstered in a combination of Nappa leather and high-quality fabric, while a black headlining and metal mesh interior trim add to the sporty ambience.

Premium features include a driver's head-up display unless the zero cost heated windscreen option is chosen, rear-view camera, front and rear parking sensors, a heated steering wheel and a 600W 14-speaker Harman Kardon surround sound system.

The Sensus Connect system provides control of car functions, multimedia features, navigation and on-board connectivity via a central nine-inch touchscreen or voice commands. Smartphones can also be synced via Android Auto and Apple CarPlay.

The advanced technology features include Pilot Assist, which controls the car's acceleration and braking, and assists with the steering to keep the S60 at the right speed, at a safe distance from any vehicles ahead and correctly positioned in its lane. To help guard against common collision risks, the S60 R-Design Edition also comes with BLIS - Blind Spot Information System - with Cross Traffic Alert and Rear Collision Mitigation.

Styling wise it's the side silhouette that has most kerb appeal with its four door coupé profile. The front end/grille is the same as the V60 estate and at the rear the sloping coupé roofline neatly flows to the boot with its upturned lip at the rear edge giving it a look of a spoiler.



Inside it's the usual Scandi-chic decluttered layout, minimalist controls and those that aren't included in the dreaded touchscreen application system are neat and well placed. I just wish it was easier to adjust the heating and ventilation controls without having to prod the touchscreen which at times needed several prods to produce a reaction.

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The seats are extremely comfortable and well shaped to give excellent support. Although the legroom in the rear is just about ok for adult passengers, the sloping roofline does



restrict headroom for six-footer tall passengers. Having to pay an extra £400 for folding 40/20/40 split rear seat backs, whether they are electrically powered or not, is not justifiable – they should be standard-fit in this premium sector. For the record the boot is large and provides 442 litres (15.61 cu.ft) of luggage space.



With its lowered sports suspension and the optional 20-inch alloy wheels the ride quality at times was challenging, even when the Comfort setting was chosen from the driving mode selector. On smoother surfaced motorways and A-roads the ride was relatively compliant but on patched surface in-town and country roads the ride comfort was poor and potentially tiring for long distance drivers. Save yourself £850 and stick with the standard alloys but even then I suspect the firm ride will still be evident due to the lowered sports suspension settings.



Generally the handling was well controlled but the S60 doesn't have the balance and poise of the rear wheel drive BMW 3 Series which is still the benchmark model in this sales sector. Cornering grip was good however with very sharp steering reaction but under hard acceleration, overtaking slower traffic quickly, there was torque-steer evident even in the engine's ECO setting. I found the Lane Departure function too intrusive so that was switched off for the duration of my week long test driving duties.

The S60 T5 uses Volvo's proven 250 hp T5 turbocharged petrol engine, matched to an eight speed automatic transmission. The gear selection can be operated by steering wheel-mounted paddle shifters for quick manual gear selection or just left in full auto mode. The auto gearbox changes did feel slow at times in whatever driving mode was selected although after a while you will get used to it, but it's not in keeping with the sports image Volvo are trying to portray with the S60.





The Drive-E lightweight 2.0 litre Volvo engines we know well from other models in the brand's range. For its size it provides a strong combination of responsive performance and efficiency. With 350 Nm (258 lb.ft) of torque available from 1,800 right up to a high 4,800 rpm it provides a very broad range of 'grunt', giving good and strong acceleration response and ideally suited to the eight speed auto gearbox set-up. Top speed is 145 mph and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is an impressively low 6.5 seconds. So this S60 is not only sporty in design it's fairly sporty in nature as well.



The new WLTP combined cycle fuel economy ranges from 35.3 to 39.8 mpg with CO2 emissions from 152 g/km, for the standard wheels but 155 g/km for the 20-inchers fitted to my test car. The overall fuel economy for my week of driving with long and short runs, town



and country roads was 30.7 mpg. Given the performance that was realistic but somewhat less than the official figures and well less than a diesel model with the same engine capacity, but one of those isn't available - and that could be a big sales issue for its UK market appeal for higher mileage users. Yes I know UK sales of diesel cars continue to fall but diesel powered models still account for almost 30% of all new car sales so far this year. That's a big chunk of the market the S60 will not sell in.

Perhaps Volvo sees the S60 PHEV plug-in hybrids as an alternative to offering a diesel model but since the Government stopped the plug-in vehicle grant, sales have fallen by 25% so far this year. Volvo offers diesel power in their V60 estate and XC60 SUV models so why not the S60 as it would broaden its appeal?

VERDICT

Overall the Volvo S60 sports saloon is another important addition to the new generation range of Volvo models and it might appeal as an alternative to the much more commonplace competitor models from Audi, BMW and Merc with better scarcity value perhaps?

For: Sports saloon kerb appeal, comprehensive safety and driver support equipment, classy interior design and quality, comfortable seats, strong engine with a wide spread of high torque.

Against: Very firm ride on optional 20-inch wheels, limited rear seat headroom for adult passengers, folding rear seat backs are an extra cost option, add too many options and the price will exceed the £40k VED Standard rate tax threshold, no diesel engine option will limit its sales appeal to business users, ungenerous warranty.



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

Volvo S60 T5, FWD, R-Design Edition sports saloon.

Price: £37,920 (£41,195 as tested).



Engine/transmission: EU 6.2 C & D Temp compliant), 2.0 litre, four cylinder, turbocharged petrol, 250 hp, 350 Nm (258 lb.ft) of torque from 1,800 rpm, eight speed automatic front wheel drive.

Performance: 145 mph, 0-62 mph 6.5 seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle 35.3 to 39.8 mpg depending on wheel size (30.7 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 155 g/km, VED First Year road tax £530 then Standard rate of £145 but if extra cost options push the on-the-road price over £40k then add another £310 to the annual Standard rate charge for five years, BiK company car tax 35%.

Insurance Group: 34E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,761 mm (15.62 ft), W 1,850 mm (6.07 ft), H 1,437 mm (4.71 ft), wheelbase 2,872 mm (9.42 ft), boot 442 litres (15.61 cu.ft) , braked towing weight 1,800 kg (3,968 lb), four doors/five seats.