Award-winning Volvo XC40 – Road Test

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Awards and sales now in for the Volvo XC40 Compact SUV...

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

Even before the Volvo mid-sized XC40 SUV range was launched in the UK in April this year it had already been given the 2018 European Car of the Year award and numerous others have followed since then, including a Towcar of the Year trophy.

Awards lead to publicity and media coverage leads to high sales, not just in the UK but worldwide. Volvo has received almost 80,000 orders for the XC40 and is expanding

production in Europe and China in order to meet demand. Production will be expanded at its Ghent manufacturing plant and Volvo Cars will add XC40 production capacity at its Luqiao plant in China in the first half of next year.

The XC40 has fast become Volvo's best-selling model range, which includes the award winning XC60 and XC90 larger SUVs and the new generation S90 and V90 saloons and estates. Even more new generation models are shortly arriving with the V60 estate and S60 sports saloon followed by the smaller S40 and V40 saloons/estates.



Volvo has been in operation since 1927 and it formed part of the Swedish Volvo Group until 1999 when the company was bought by Ford Motor Company of the US. In 2010, Volvo Cars

was acquired by the Chinese Geely Holdings organisation that lavished huge investment in the brand, leading to new technologies and a raft of new model ranges we are all now well aware off. Volvo is now one of the most respected premium car brands in the world with sales of 571,577 cars in 2017 in about 100 countries.

Volvo's UK sales last year were 46,139 units and this year sales of 23,605 have been achieved, a little lower than the same period last year but better than the overall fall in this country's new car market sales. With the first of the comprehensive range of XC40 now in customer's hands and with more derivatives to follow, including plug-in hybrid and pure electric versions, higher sales should flow in despite the hugely competitive SUV market with its huge variety of competitor brands and models.

With prices starting from £27,610 through to £40,055 the Volvo XC40's main premium brand competitors include the Range Rover Evoque, the Audi Q3, BMW X1, Mercedes-Benz GLA and MINI Countryman. However the top spec versions of the Nissan Qashqai, Peugeot 3008, Vauxhall Grandland X, Kia Sportage and the Ford Kuga are also worthy of consideration – but there are many more.

XC40 range turbo petrol engine choices are T3 1.5 three-cylinder 156 hp manual 2WD, T4 2.0 litre four cylinder 190 hp auto 4WD and T5 four cylinder 247 hp auto 4WD. Turbodiesel engine choices are all four cylinder 2.0 litre units, the D3 150 hp 2WD manual and auto, the same unit with auto and 4WD and the D4 190 hp 4WD auto.

The core specification levels, depending on the engine chosen, are Momentum, R-Design, Inscription and all these also have additional higher Pro spec levels. Topping out the choices at the vehicles' introduction was the Launch Edition version with just 1,200 units available, but these are now sold-out. Initially diesel units were predicted to the best–selling engines but the overall new car market has moved towards petrol-power and just recently Volvo announced they were no longer going to develop diesel engines – and in future their power units would be petrol, petrol/electric plug-in hybrid and all-electric.

The XC40 had first use of the new Volvo/Geely CMA compact platform which will also be used for the future S40/V40 new models. Volvo describes the styling of the XC40 as not a scaled down version of the larger XC60 or XC90 SUVs. It has its own identity; don't look on it as a brother, more of a cousin they said.



But the Volvo SUV genes are still evident, it looks chunky and imposing with a high waistline and unusually in this sector it has a slightly wider track at the rear than the front to accommodate wide haunches and a 'planted' stance on the road. The overall length is 4,425 mm (14.52 ft) with a 2,702 mm (8.86 ft) wheelbase. The width is 1,910 mm (6.27 ft)

and height 1,658 mm (5.44 ft). At the rear the boot gives a minimum of 460 litres (16.24 cu.ft) of space but with the rear seat backs folded this goes up to a maximum 1,336 litres (47.18 cu.ft), not the largest in its sector. There is a cleverly designed 'floating' boot floor which can be folded to separate the boot into two areas to securely locate and segregate bags. In addition the load area cover can be stowed beneath the load floor when the boot needs to be loaded over the height of the glass line.

Inside at the rear is enough space for three passengers but with the front two seats fully back the legroom is on the tight side for tall adults. Up front it's very much of Volvo's current styling form with a standard-fit tablet style vertical touchscreen dominating the dashboard. This controls most of the function for the sat-nav, heating, ventilation, DAB radio and connectivity facilities. As always it will bring complaints from some users and me of having to use the touchscreen for these functions rather than safer and simpler conventional controls. (Kim adds, "I agree wholeheartedly with David on this point; the necessity, in this model and many other recent cars, to use the touch screen for operating such controls adds unwanted complexity rather than functionality, and – importantly – can represent a real distraction, for many drivers, from controlling the vehicle…").

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The interior quality is impeccable and the specification items are considerable even for the lowest Momentum models which will be ample for most users. As an indication, the starter Momentum spec level includes Sensus Navigation with full European mapping with free lifetime map updates and live traffic information, the 9-inch tablet style touchscreen, voice activated control system, Volvo On-Call with remote control of various car functions from a smartphone, smartwatch or tablet, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity, automatic LED headlights, two-zone air-con, 12.3-inch TFT driver info display, Drive Mode settings, City Safety which includes pedestrian, cyclist and large animal detection, front collision warning and fully automatic emergency braking, Oncoming Lane Mitigation, 18-inch alloy wheels, rear parking sensors, cruise control with speed limiter and height-adjustable front seats. The Pro additional spec adds active bending headlights, powered driver's seat, heated

front seats, heated windscreen and auto-folding door mirrors. And so the spec climbs as you go through the range.

The T5 petrol 4WD First Edition version I tried recently with its hefty £40,055 price ticket is 'fully-loaded'. Already sold out they were based on the already high spec R-Design versions which include leather upholstery and 19-inch wheels. First Edition spec adds such items as the Xenium Pack which normally costs an extra £1,600 and includes a power glass tilt and slide sunroof, Park Assist Pilot and 360-degree surround view camera. Also included was the £1,400 Intellisafe Pro Pack consisting of Pilot Assist semi-autonomous drive technology, Blind Spot information and Cross Traffic Alert with auto braking, hands-free opening and closing tailgate, Harman Kardon premium sound system, wireless phone charging, powered and heated rear seats, heated steering wheel, and power-operated rear seat backrests and headrests.

The T5 First Edition test car I lived with for a week of driving had large 19-inch wheels and numerous lengths of potholed roads resulted in a firm ride and thumps and bumps were felt inside the cabin, but on smoother winding roads the vehicle came into its own with surefooted well-balanced handling thanks to the 4WD/AWD traction system. The steering was light at slow in-town speeds and easy for parking but firmed up nicely at higher out-of-town speeds.

The T5 AWD comes with a standard fit eight-speed auto gearbox and this turbocharged, four cylinder petrol engine pushes out 247 hp and 350 Nm (258 lb.ft) of torque from 1,800 rpm. Most noticeable was how much more refined and quieter it was than the D4 diesel model I tried at the media launch prior to the range going on sale in April, but the diesel model still makes more sense for high mileage business users in terms of fuel economy. The T5 petrol engine however is more refined, quieter, more responsive and slightly faster with a top speed of 140 mph and zero to 62 mph takes 6.5 seconds. However the Official Combined Cycle fuel economy figure of 39.8 mpg does ring alarm bells and my week long test driving overall figure was just 30.2 mpg. This was not driving the vehicle very hard at all and so not close enough to the new official WLTP testing procedure figures for all new cars in force

from September this year. With CO2 emissions of 166 g/km VED First Year road tax is £515 before reducing to the £140 Standard rate. But there is a sting in the tail to these running costs – as this model costs over £40k it incurs the VED £310 annual supplement for five-years from Year Two onwards. Company car drivers will pay 34% BiK tax and insurance is Group 33E.

As a comparison my colleague Robin Roberts has just recently tested the XC40 with the D4 190 hp turbodiesel engine with the same auto gearbox, 4WD and with the First Edition spec priced at £39,905. His test driving fuel economy figure over similar roads and traffic conditions was 46 mpg so the D4 diesel is much more fuel frugal. With lower CO2 emissions of 133 g/km the higher diesel rate VED tax costs are still the same as the T5 petrol, the BiK tax cost is lower at 31% and the insurance group is also the same. Performance is slightly below that of the T5 petrol with 130 mph top speed and zero to 62 mph taking 7.9 seconds. So for high mileage users the D4 diesel not only costs slightly less to buy it’s also cheaper to run.



VERDICT

Whichever engine or spec level is chosen the XC40 is a good buy; it's the new 'kid-on-the-block' in a very congested mid-sized SUV environment and so far it's proving popular with customers around the World so it's proved its worth.

For: Awarded 2018 European Car of the Year title, classy styling inside and out, desirable kerb appeal, high specification even for base spec models, clever boot floor load securing combinations, comprehensive safety and driving support systems, wide range of models and engine choices with hybrids/electric versions to come later.

Against: First Edition spec level sold out, limited rear seat legroom, only average boot/load space, poor fuel economy compared to the official figures, firm ride over poorer road surfaces, too many most-used controls have to be operated via the touchscreen, ungenerous warranty.

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

Volvo XC40 T5 AWD automatic First Edition, compact SUV.

Price: £40,055.

Engine/transmission: T5, 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbo-petrol 247 hp, 350 Nm (258 lb.ft) of torque from 1,800 rpm, eight speed automatic with AWD.

Performance: 140 mph, 0–62mph 6.5 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 39.8 mpg (30.2 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 166 g/km, VED First Year road tax £515 then £140 Standard rate + £310 annual supplement for five years as it cost over £40k, BiK company car tax 34%.

Insurance Group: 33E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,425 mm (14.52 ft), W 1,910 mm (6.27 ft), H 1,658 mm (5.44 ft), wheelbase 2,702 mm (8.86 ft), boot/load space 460 to 1,336 litres (16.24 to 47.18 cu.ft), braked towing weight 2,100 kg (4,630 lb), five doors/five seats.