

Best Christmas Car? Volvo V90 Road Test

Published: December 10, 2016

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Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/best-christmas-car-volvo-v90-road-test/>



Best Christmas Car? Keith Ward nominates the Volvo V90...

FIRST sign of a change in season – you are grateful for the optional Winter Pack fitted to this Volvo V90. So – heated windscreen and washer nozzles, a headlight cleaning system [and, really spoiling yourself, a heated steering wheel. That's a total £525 to you sir, madam.



That other winter boon of heated front seats is fitted as standard, no extra charge, to every V90. With icy surfaces in mind, so is Volvo's run-off-road protection. Should the car inadvertently leave the highway, the front seat belts automatically tighten while a collapsible section of the seat frames helps prevent spinal injuries. A "Volvo On Call" app allows the driver to remotely heat the cabin in advance.

And if you suddenly happen upon Santa's sleigh, something called Large Animal Detection helps to prevent collisions "with animals such as deer" by scanning the area in front of the car and automatically applying the brakes in an emergency if you fail to react in time.

Altogether, the V90 is an impressive combination of estate car practicality, plush interior and up-to-the-minute gadgetry. It is already collecting gongs, the latest (28th November 2016) being no less than 'Best Estate in the World', from TopGear (correct) Magazine.

Practical? The broad tailgate raises electrically. (The only blip here is that in normal five-seat use the luggage cover concertinas upwards rather than fully retracting, so restricts access to the deep boot.) But there's a pop-up buffer and strap in the boot to stop your shopping sliding around. And at a touch, the rear divided seats and headrests slam down to extend the boot floor, already flush with the rear sill to ease loading, to almost six feet (1,780 mm on our tape).

That narrowly beats even the enormous Skoda Superb Estate (just under £36,000 in its poshest form) as well as Volvo's Mercedes and BMW premium class rivals in this respect, although the German duo win on overall cargo volume thanks to their squarer body shape. The V90 majors on style and sloping sleekness, a world away from those boxy Volvo estates of the 1970s.

Plump and comfortable seats are faced in leather and there is limo-type space in the rear. A feature of the quality cockpit is a nine-inch, touch and swipe centre screen, from the XC90. "It is designed to operate like a smartphone or tablet - even when you're wearing gloves", boast Volvo. There's a small library of sub-menus to leaf through.



But it does demand your attention, and perhaps too much, on the move? Volvo are not alone in this headlong techno-fashion trend, but could it prove a chink in their hitherto industry-leading armour of safety? In general, should simple inhibitors restrict some functions to when a car is stationary, with the parking brake applied?

Then there's Pilot Assist and Adaptive Cruise Control, the semi-autonomous drive technology that is fitted as standard to all V90s. This pioneering driver aid takes care of the steering, acceleration and braking at up to 80 mph, helping to make long motorway journeys less stressful and tiring. Also standard are dual zone climate and real-time navigation with traffic info.

The V90 comes initially in a six-strong range, perming three levels of trim with two auto-transmission diesel engines – a 190 PS D4 or a 235 PS PowerPulse D5 with All Wheel Drive – at prices between £34,555 and £44,055.

We tried the base D4 Momentum, but with options including full-leather upholstery, powered front seats with driver memory and alerts for blind spot overtakers and rear cross-traffic, raising the price to £38,880.

A surprising omission on such a large car was a rear view camera – listed at another £400, or £700 for a 360-degree surround view. And owners with heavy loads to transport or tow might consider self-levelling rear air suspension at £950.

Several long journeys conducted in great comfort were included in a week's effortless motoring of 700 miles at an average of over 48 mpg from the well insulated four-cylinder diesel, which is no slouch. A low CO2 rating means a lowly £30 annual VED after a free first year.

On the way: a 4WD V90 Cross Country, with increased ride height and modified chassis, at prices £39,785 to £43,585 for delivery early 2017.

Volvo, still Swedish-based but Chinese-owned since 2010, saw sales in the first nine months



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of this year rise by 7.63 per cent in the UK and by 9.6 per cent globally. For them, a Happy Christmas seems assured.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Volvo V90 D4 Momentum auto.

Five-door; five-seat estate.

Vital statistics: Length 4,936 mm (194.3 in); width 2,019 mm (79.5 in); ht 1,475 mm (58.1 in). □ Boot Length 1,170 mm (46.1 in) extending to 1,780 mm (70.1 in); min width 1,020 mm (40.1 in); volume 723 – 1,526 litres (25.53 – 53.89 cu.ft).



Weights: Kerb 1,696 kg (3,739 lb); max total 2,310 kg (5,093 lb); max towing (braked) 1,800 kg (3,968 lb).

Engine: Diesel; 2.0 litre; four cyl; 2WD; 8-speed automatic. □188 bhp @ 4,250 rpm; max torque 295 lb ft (400 Nm) @ 1,750-2,500 rpm

Performance:

0-60 mph: 8.0 secs.

Top speed: 140 mph.

Fuel consumption: On test 48.3 mpg (Official Combined 62.8 mpg); tank capacity 55 litres (12.10 Imperial gallons).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 119 g/km; Band C; VED nil then £30; Benefit-in-Kind tax rate 23%.

Insurance Group: 27E

Price: £34,555; as tested, with options £38,880.

Rivals (Prices from): Mercedes E-Class estate £36,660; BMW 5-series Touring £33,315; Audi A6 Avant £35,095.