Latest Volvo V90 T6 AWD Cross Country Pro Estate – Road Test

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David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) test drives the 2018 Volvo V90 T6 AWD Cross Country Pro Estate – with petrol option instead of diesel, but is this actually better?

With the demonisation of diesel powered vehicles and the significant fall in oil-burner sales, a fall in the UK new car market of 25.6% in January on top of the 17.1% for the whole of 2017, it's only natural that manufacturers are introducing more petrol engine options.

Volvo, for instance, with their V90 estates, have just added a T4 turbocharged 190 hp four cylinder petrol unit for their mainstream 2WD versions to sell alongside their D4 190 hp

2WD and AWD D5 PowerPulse 235 hp turbodiesel units, plus they have on offer the T8 Twin Engine petrol/electric AWD version. For the top of the range Cross Country Pro they have also included the T6 2.0 litre 310 hp supercharger/turbocharger petrol unit with AWD and eight speed automatic transmission.

With the forthcoming rise from April this year in CO2 based VED road tax charges and company car the Benefit-in-Kind tax supplement for diesel vehicles rising from 3% to 4% over petrol powered vehicles, the industry is expecting a shift to more customers ordering more petrol powered vehicles in future. Of course there is still the unknown number of UK towns and cities that could impose restrictions (or charges) on whether diesel powered cars, even with the latest EU6 compliant engines, are allowed to operate in certain areas.

Prices for the complete line-up of V90 and V90 Cross Country models range from £36,435 up to £50,855 for the top of the range Cross Country Pro T6 AWD petrol version I have recently been testing.



The growth in the UK's new car sales last year was only in the Dual Purpose sector as the industry calls it, we know it better as 4x4s, SUVs and Crossovers, as aspirational owners ditched their hatchbacks, saloons, estates and MPVs to get into these latest must-haves to join the more affluent motoring fraternity who have long-bought such vehicles. With the huge number of additional new SUVs joining the car market manufacturers must be confident that this craze will be a long-term one.

However, although no official figures are available, I am beginning to see on our roads more new high class premium brand estates being used as alternatives to large SUVs, and a lot of them have the all important 4WD/AWD function. Perhaps these customers are now

searching for something a bit more exclusive as the SUV sector has definitely become mainstream.

Not all such estates or even 4WD saloons will be dual purpose on-off-road vehicles, some just have 4WD for added traction on-road, but the Volvo V90 Cross Country and Cross Country Pro versions are definitely dual purpose with their raised ride height, off-road driving mode and protective exterior body cladding.

The V90 I have written about before so this road test is more to do with the real-life viability of choosing a high performance petrol engine rather than a diesel unit. Despite the forthcoming higher tax charges and potential implementation of diesel-free driving zones, expect diesel models to remain the mainstay engine of choice in the large saloon and estate market sector, especially for high mileage business car executive users.



The V90 Cross Country range will compete against the premium brand Audi A6 Allroad and the Mercedes E-Class All-Terrain estates, and there is also the slightly less expensive new Vauxhall Insignia Country Tourer 210 hp turbodiesel to consider.

The V90 is a big estate at almost five metres (16.4 ft) in length, it's long and sleek and roomy front and rear, especially for the three rear seat passengers, where there is lots of legroom thanks to the long wheelbase. There is also a large fully carpeted boot giving 723

litres (25.53 cu.ft) of capacity and 1,526 litres (53.89 cu.ft) with the rear seats folded down. For good measure this T6 Cross Country Pro version has a braked towing weight capacity of 2,500 kg (5,512 lb) which certainly puts it into the large SUV domain.

The standard Cross Country Pro specification is premium class, with such items as Volvo's Sensus Connect system of connectivity functions, Sensus Navigation with European lifetime map updates and traffic information, a 9.0-inch centre console vertical touchscreen, voice control functions, City Safety including pedestrian safety, front end collision warning and fully automatic braking, Pilot Assist with Adaptive Cruise Control, Run-Off Road Protection, LED headlights with active high beam, two zone Cleanzone air-con, power operated tailgate, leather faced upholstery, heated front seats, 17-inch alloy wheels and 60/40 split electronically operated folding rear seats. With really bad winter weather prevailing during my test drive period the heated windscreen, door mirrors driver's seat and steering wheel made for comfortable driving and the ice, snow and very wet roads were well catered for with the AWD traction system.

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But the spec doesn't stop there as there are lots of extra cost options and my test car came equipped with the £2,000 Xenium pack consisting of a tilt and slide glass sunroof, 360-degree parking camera and Park Assist Pilot and the £3,000 Sensus Connect with the premium sound system by Bowers and Wilkins which was superb. It also had Intellisafe Surround with Blind Spot monitoring and Cross Traffic Alert at £600, a £275 Family pack with booster cushions for the outer rear seats, power child door locks, rear door sun curtains and the Nappa Leather pack costing £1,650 which includes ventilated upholstery and powered front passenger seat. There were even more single options, the main one being the £1,500 Active Four-C chassis with adaptive suspension settings and rear air suspension which is well worthwhile for even better ride comfort and balanced handling on winding and undulating country roads.

The most important part of this particular V90 Cross Country Pro is the T6 four-cylinder,

310 hp petrol engine with a supercharger for when the engine is accelerating from low revs, with the turbo seamlessly taking over from mid to high revs. The engine is smooth at low in-town speeds but also very impressive with its strength and response at mid to high range speeds, and cruising on motorways becomes much quieter than either of the D4 and D5 diesels. There are of course the normal choices of driving modes with Eco, Comfort, Off-Road and Dynamic settings. The Hill Descent off road driving function is controlled by the speed limiter.

The eight-speed auto gearbox, although not the fastest-changing unit I've tried, does have well suited gear ratios to optimise the 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque available from 2,200 rpm right up to 5,500 rpm, so in reality the engine never runs out of giving power. Top speed is 140 mph and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is just 6.3 seconds.



That's all very impressive but now we get to the thorny issues of running costs. Officially this V90 Cross Country Pro T6 model will return 36.7 mpg in the Combined Cycle, but during my test drive week I couldn't get close to that figure with 28.4 mpg. By comparison the Cross Country models with their D4 and D5 turbodiesel units have Combined Cycle figures of 54.3 and 53.3 mpg respectively. When it comes to those all important CO2 figures the T6 petrol emits 177 g/km so VED road tax is £800 First Year rate and then £140 Standard rate plus the £310 supplement for five years as the vehicle costs over £40k. By comparison the diesels give out 138/139 g/km of CO2 so VED First Year road tax is £200 and then £140 Standard rate plus the £310 supplement. When it comes to that all-important Benefit-in-Kind company car tax rates the T6 petrol is rated at 34% and the two diesels at 29%.

VERDICT

Finally to put the whole issue of running costs – petrol versus diesel – to bed, the V90 Cross Country Pro T6 petrol AWD model costs £50,855, the D4 diesel AWD £44,405 and the D5 AWD diesel £48,205. Whichever way you count the costs, the diesels still rule the roost both in terms of lower prices, taxes and running costs so it's hard to recommend the T6 version tested even though it's a lovely engine to drive. The V90 Cross Country Pro in whatever engine form chosen it's an imposing premium product and certainly more exclusive than the now commonplace SUVs.

For: Classy and desirable exterior styling, chic interior, high specification, lots of rear seat space, loads of loads space, high towing capacity, fast and responsive T6 petrol engine, very capable and safe off-road ability.

Against: More expensive to buy and run with much higher CO2 based tax costs than the turbodiesel versions, hard to recommend over the D5 AWD turbodiesel version because of those higher costs, real-life fuel economy was not close enough to the official Combined Cycle figure.



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

Volvo V90 T6 AWD Cross Country Pro Automatic estate.

Price: £50,855 (£62,305 as tested).

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder, supercharged and turbocharged petrol, 310 hp, 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque from 2,200 rpm, eight speed automatic with AWD. Performance: 140 mph, 0-62 mph 6.3 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 36.7 mpg (28.4 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 177 g/km, VED First Year road tax £800 then Standard rate of £140 plus £310 annual supplement for five years as the vehicle costs over £40k, BiK company car tax 34%.

Insurance Group: 39E.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,936 mm (16.19 ft), W 1,895 mm (6.22 ft), H 1,543 mm (5.06 ft), wheelbase 2,941 mm (9.65 ft), boot/load space 723 to 1,526 litres (25.53 to 53.89 cu.ft), braked towing weight 2,500 kg (5,512 lb).