New Volvo V90 Estate Road Test

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Grace, Space and Pace… David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) assesses the latest Volvo V90 estate car – voted 2016 Scottish Car of the Year.

In September Volvo launched their premium brand graceful and sophisticated S90 large

saloon and the V90 estate models. S90 saloons are priced from £32,555 and rise to £42,055. The more popular V90 estates start from £34,555 and rise to £44,055.



Volvo UK does not talk about sales numbers but the brand has seen an increase so far this year of new car sales by 7.8% with a total of 38,888 registrations.

However Volvo UK does say that out of the two body styles the V90 estate will be the choice of 75% of customers. Both body styles currently are available with Momentum, R-design and Inscription specification levels with each taking around one third of sales.

Competitors include the Audi A6 Avant, BMW 5 Series Touring and Mercedes-Benz E-Class Estate.



Currently the range has Volvo's highly rated fuel-efficient Drive-E all-aluminium 2.0 litre, four cylinder D4 190 or D5 235 hp turbodiesel engines mated as standard with an eight speed automatic transmission. The 190 hp engine has front wheel drive and the Power-Pulse 235 hp unit with compressed air induction feeding the turbocharger and comes with AWD. In quarter one next year AWD D4/D5 Cross Country estate models join the range and mid-year will see the addition of a petrol-electric T8 Twin Engine plug-in hybrid estate – which does 28 miles from a charge – join the line-up.

Also available from Volvo's tuning division – Polestar – is a Performance Optimisation

package costing £835. This marginally increases power/torque outputs but gives sharper engine and gearshift responses.

Whereas previous top of the range Volvo saloons and estates have adopted a boxy design for maximum interior practical passenger and load carrying abilities, the new S90/V90 models are far more elegant, with sleek styling lines outside and a classy interior, with clean premium Scandinavian design incorporating leather upholstery and light colour wood trim. All models have Volvo's Sensus operating system of driving aids as well as the latest in connectivity functions.

Sensus includes semi-autonomous drive technology as standard to make operating easier and safer. This takes care of the steering, accelerator and automatic braking at up to 80 mph to keep the car within the required lane and at a set speed and no longer requires a lead vehicle to follow. Sensus also includes large animal detection warning and run-off road mitigation. It is also the umbrella for intuitive infotainment, including a nine-inch vertical touch screen, a voice control system and integration of Apple CarPlay which is an extra cost option.

Standard equipment is comprehensive and some of the highlights are the Sensus system which also includes City Safe warning and braking, plus there are active beam LED headlights, two-zone climate control, power operated tailgate, power operated split and fold rear seats and headrests, 17-inch alloy wheels, eight-inch crystal driver info screen, leather upholstery, heated front seats, electric windows and folding door mirrors.

And so the specification increases as we move up the range. I tested the V90 D4 190 with the top level Inscription specification, priced at £37,555. The additional spec. includes such items as soft leather upholstery, powered front seats with memory function, a 12.3-inch crystal info screen, keyless entry and drive function, interior theatre lighting, 18-inch alloy wheels, high-gloss front grille with chrome inserts, chromed lower side mouldings and chromed lower front bumper sections.

But the nitty-gritty of an estate, even an elegant one, is mainly about space. The overall length is almost five metres (approaching 16.5 ft) with a width of 1,895 mm (6.22 ft), but it's got a lower roofline than previous big Volvo estates at 1,475 mm (4.84 ft). Whilst the load area is wide and long having a boot capacity of 560 litres (19.78 cu.ft) going up to a maximum 1,526 litres (53.89 cu.ft), the height is reduced because of the lower roofline – which some potential owners might find off-putting, especially if a tall dog is part of the family. In the passenger compartment there is ample space, especially rear seat leg room. Even with six-footers in the front seats there is still lots of leg room for rear seat passengers. Potentially you could carry three adults in the rear but the design of the seats is more suitable for two adults.

Overall the interior is really classy and comfortable, you feel cosseted in a safe environment and even long journeys were not tiring. The ride was comfortable and the suspension compliant, certainly not as unforgiving as the Audi A6 or BMW 5 Series. And there is the choice of driving modes, Comfort, Dynamic and Eco. Comfort I used most of the time, Dynamic hardly at all – it's not that sort of an estate and Eco I selected for motorway cruising. As for the driving functions they were all laid out in a logical manner. I have complained before with other brands about too many controls for important functions being contained within a touchscreen system. The tablet style portrait touchscreen is to some extent the same for Volvo's Sensus system but there are short-cut buttons for such things as the temperature controls which made life easier and a little safer than scrolling through sub-menus to find the right operating mode.

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As for driving dynamics? The German competitors feel more tied-down when it comes to handling. The Volvo V90 wafts along which was not unpleasant and a darn-side more comfortable. There was some body roll during cornering but again it didn't detract from the driving pleasure. Despite its size the V90 felt reasonably agile and the steering precise. I know Volvo place great importance on driving support and safety functions but I found the Pilot Assist semi autonomous steering intrusive at times, especially on motorways. The

steering sensors use the painted lines to keep you on the straight and narrow. I found the V90 too eager not to change lanes as the steering firms up too much for my liking to keep the car straight ahead and the warning vibration kicks in when you are leaving the motorway lane it thinks you need to be in. Autonomous driving is coming and Volvo says their cars will be fully autonomous by 2021 with trials starting in London next year as part of their Drive Me global preparation programme – so best we get used to it.

As for the D4 2.0 litre, four-cylinder turbodiesel engine I have nothing but praise for Volvo's Drive-E technology. It is refined and the response is really good with 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque developed from 1,750 rpm. With the eight-speed silky smooth changing standard-fit automatic gearbox 1,750 rpm gives you an effortless 70 mph cruising speed. This helped no end in returning an average real-life 46.1 mpg overall during my week long test driving stint. It is of course some way short of the official 62.8 mpg Combined Cycle figure but for an estate of this size it's impressive. It isn't slow either, with a top speed of 140 mph and a zero to 62 mph acceleration time of 8.5 seconds. With CO2 emissions of 119 g/km, VED road tax VED road tax is £0 for the First Year rate and then only £30 for subsequent years. Company car drivers will pay 23% Benefit-in-Kind tax. Insurance is Group 28E and warranty is three years and 60,000 miles – which is not that generous.

VERDICT

The Volvo V90 is an interesting alternative to the premium German brands in the executive estate car market and certainly a more comfortable one to travel in.

For: Premium brand kerb appeal, classy and beautifully styled interior, high safety spec, comfortable ride, plentiful rear seat legroom, fuel and tax efficient for such a large estate.

Against: Boot height not as large as we expect from a big Volvo estate, semi-autonomous steering can be intrusive on motorways, not a very generous mileage limit for the warranty, expensive array of extra cost options.



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

Volvo V90 D4 Inscription estate. Price: £37,555 (£46,030 as tested).

Engine/transmission: Drive-E D4 2.0 litre, four cylinder, turbodiesel 190 hp, 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, eight speed automatic, front wheel drive.

Performance:

0-62mph: 8.5 seconds

Top speed: 140 mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 62.8 mpg (46.1 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 119 g/km, VED road tax £0/£30, BIK company car tax rate 23%.

Insurance Group: 28E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

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 to 1,526 litres (19.78 to 53.89 cu.ft), five doors/five seat