Volvo XC40 Ultra, B4 Mild hybrid – Road Test

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Think family cars and I bet the next image in any driver's eyes is a Volvo, writes Robin Roberts (and WheelsWithinWales).

Once associated with the immensely practical, purposeful and frills-free

estates, the company has undergone a rejuvenation and now offers a range of sophisticated SUVs brimming with the latest safety technology.

They also started off big to sell to the US market but realised they needed to offer more compact SUV models for Europe. That process of change was started by the XC40 series in about 2018 which spawned petrol and diesel models before moving with the times and into the electric age.

After committing to and then pausing their push towards fully electric models this decade, Volvo wisely decided to keep their loyal buyers and dealers happy with hybrid petrol & electric models.

After the roll-back of green motoring in America it is probably the right move for Volvo and the EU states are also seeing a slow down in sales for now, although they will inevitably rise over the next ten years when costs come down, which is a major barrier for the majority of motorists.

So you can currently choose from a range of petrol or electric XC40s with front or four-wheel-drive and they have won praise and awards for their towing abilities as well, with up to 2,100 kg (4,630 lb) braked trailers hauled along by the B4 model we tested, and probably the best version for country families with ‘boxes’ and trailers in their families.

Our test car had only a £150 Tempa spare wheel option with no-cost metallic paint and Connect suede textile Microtech upholstery.

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Every XC40 includes Google Services including map and voice control and four years' data, mobile compatibility with wireless charging, parking and safety sensors, powered tailgate with 12.3-inch driver's display along with 9-inch central touchscreen.

The Volvo's power-train is well respected although it has a big job to do pulling the near two-tonnes car along, particularly if loaded with a family. The engine, however, was surprisingly quiet and there was no noise from the seven-speed transmission with its quick and very smooth changes.



You have normal automatic drive or can easily slip into a manual mode to pick the preferred ratios for any task on or off-road situation. There's good ground clearance to assist in muddy tracks and on-road the refinement ensures you have as much confidence as well, but the road rumbles from the 20-inch tyres do come into the cabin all the time.

For a large model with high riding position on the road the steering is very good and you have sensors and a reversing camera as well as overhead view to place it into a parking spot without any difficulty.



We thought it stuck to the road very well but that did not stop it rolling about as the springing was firm but compliant. It resisted the temptation to dip or lift under brakes or throttle.

Slowing was drama-free with good balanced feel through the pedal and a strong parking brake for slopes or traffic.

The throttle pedal is linked to the highly advanced safety system in the car and resists exceeding speed limits while the forward radar keeps a safe distance from vehicles infront.

We used the cruise control a lot but found it a bit slow responded to deceleration or increasing gaps to vehicles when it was engaged, irrespective of the chosen distance marker.

Secondary controls grouped close to the wheel and driver all worked easily and the display ahead of the steering wheel was large and clear at all times.

The central infotainment cluster was packed with features and you had to scroll through most of them after taking your eyes off the road ahead which is not ideal and best done when stationary. I felt there was just too much pushed into this array and some separate buttons or sliders would be a better idea for the climate control for instance.

The heating and ventilation was wide ranging, comprehensive and effective, keeping the big cabin at a chosen temperature with powerful fans, fine directional control and backed up by powered windows and a very big sunroof behind a full length shade.

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The Volvo XC40 credentials as a family car are impressed by the really

plentiful oddments room and assorted bins, trays and pockets throughout the cabin and boot area as welll.


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Access was good with a high flat floor to the easily extended loadbed, offset split rear seatbacks and wide opening doors for getting out. The seats' deep shaping and rounded backrests made them very comfortable and powered adjustment was very fine infront and matched to a multi adjustable steering column and wheel.

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It all felt very well put together and looked clean and distraction-free but I thought it would benefit from having a shallow but much wider infotainment display, possibly running into a separate display for the essential driver information in line of sight.

VERDICT

Volvo has come a long way and has a loyal band of buyers but if it's to continue against rivals it also needs to raise its game and not just in the field of electrification.

The basics really are there and very good, but they could possibly be improved as time goes on.

For: Very spacious, comfortable seats, economical, good smooth powertrain, family friendly features

Against: Slightly firm ride, modest performance, fiddly infotainment centre & display.



FAST FACTS

Model: Volvo XC40 Ultra, B4 Mild hybrid Ultra

Price: £46,520

Mechanical: 197 bhp 4 cyl 2.0 petrol-electric engine, 7 speed Auto, AWD

Max Speed: 112 mph

0 – 62mph: 7.6 sec

Combined MPG: 43mpg

Insurance Group: 26

C02 emissions: 153g/km

Bik rating: 35%, £670FY, £590SRx5

Warranty: 3 years/ 60,000 miles

Size: L 4.44 m (14.57 ft), W 2.04 m (6.69 ft), H 1.66 m (5.45 ft)

Bootspace: 452 to 1,328 litres (15.96 to 46.90 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 1,812 kg (3,995 lb)

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