Volvo XC90 Road Test

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Front, dynamic image of the Volvo XC90 in Osmium Grey

Keith Ward assesses ‘The Safest Volvo Ever Built’…

TOUTED as the “Safest Volvo ever built”, which is saying something, the all-new XC90 is a towering seven-seat SUV, almost five metres (16 ft 5in) long, to take on in the lux market such as the BMW X5, Audi Q7, Mercedes M-Class, new Jaguar F-Pace and Land-Rover Discovery. So just as well it oozes quality.

Having replaced the original model launched in 2002, its latest in a clutch of gongs is Best Large SUV for the second year running (Auto Express July 2016), Car of the Year among UK car dealers (July 2016), Best SUV from Fleet World (April 2016), UK SUV of the Year (March 2016) and best in class in the Euro NCAP safety awards (January 2016). In the USA it is named 2016 Truck of the Year, in the way they categorise SUVs over the pond.

Most striking interior feature is a central tablet-like touchscreen control console, almost button-free. It links to steering wheel and voice controls and gives access to cloud-based applications. It repays time browsing the handbook. Updates on latest versions (model year 2017) include Spotify music streaming.

The gear lever is made of crystal glass from a famous Swedish maker. While Volvo is Chinese-owned, the XC90 is engineered and built in Sweden. Just in case you forget its heritage, a little Swedish flag is sewn into the upholstery.

Interior space is massive, helped by the company's latest compact four-cylinder engines, mounted further forward than before, and a longer wheelbase. All five rear seats in two rows fold down flush individually to produce a flat floor over six feet, or nearly 1.9 metres, long according to our tape and 44 inches or 1,120 mm wide. Loading to the roof, you can cram in almost 2,000 litres or two cubic metres (70.63 cu.ft) of cargo. Practical standard features include a touch-operated luggage blind, power tailgate and roof rails.



Rear seats are thinner than before to allow them to fold flat, but without obvious penalty in comfort during samplings on short journeys. Each row is set slightly higher than the one in front, for better views forward. A middle-row passenger on a seat slid back behind an average-height driver would have around eight inches (203 mm) of leg room. People up to five feet seven inches (1.7 m) tall can occupy the rearmost pair, so they're not just kiddie perches.

Standard features generously include navigation, powered front seats, leather-faced upholstery, dual-zone climate, cruise control, hill start and descent, rear park assist, 10-speaker audio, 19-inch alloys and that central touch-and-swipe screen with minimalist controls – a maximum eight buttons. Last autumn the XC90 became one of the first cars to use Apple CarPlay and Google's Android Auto.

On safety, all versions come with pedestrian and cyclist detection, driver alert with lane departure warning and two “world firsts”: Run-off-road protection against spinal injuries and auto-brake if the driver turns unwittingly across an oncoming vehicle. Side curtain airbags extend to third row occupants.

The XC90 is not cheap at prices upward of £45,750 – certainly a steep step upwards from the original version and firmly into Mercedes-BMW-Audi territory.

The nine-strong Volvo range runs to a choice of five engines, now topped by a T8 petrol-electric hybrid (£54,955), and three trim levels.

If it comes to off-roading, the XC90 has a ground clearance of 238 mm (9.37in) on its standard suspension, approach angle 23.8 and departure angle 23.3 degrees and a wading depth of 450 mm (17.72in). For such as caravanners and horse boxers, the maximum braked trailer weight is 2,700 kg (5,952 lb); unbaked 750 kg (1,653 lb).

Volvo UK are reckoning to sell 5,000 XC90’s a year: 75 per cent of those diesels and 50 per cent Momentum base trim, both appealing to business users. Our test car was a diesel D5 Momentum, nominally the entry model at £45,750, although a host of options quickly hoisted that to over £50,000.

Especially valued on such a huge car was a £700 all-round parking camera system and a cross-traffic alert to vehicles and pedestrians passing behind you – included in a £1,500 “Intellisafe Pro” package. Some would value a £575 “Winter Pack” of heating to front seats, windscreen and washer nozzles

On the road, despite its bulk, the XC90 is light to steer and an easy drive – once you are aboard, that is. Its height can make entry and exit an undignified exercise. Front seat passengers yearned for the aid of a grab handle. Thick screen pillars and huge door mirrors hamper vision from the driver’s seat. Standard 19-inch wheels (you can order up to 22-inch) tend to transmit road surface irregularities.

Being Chinese-owned has produced a revolution in the fortunes of Swedish-based Volvo. An investment equivalent to £7.5 billion over the next four years will see four new assembly plants – three in China, one in the USA – as well as a near doubling of global production to 800,000 cars a year and all models replaced, the XC90 being the first.

VERDICT

Impressive!



Rear, dynamic image of the Volvo XC90 in Osmium Grey

Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Volvo XC90 D5 AWD Momentum SUV; five doors; seven seats (2-3-2).

Size:

Length: 4,950 mm (16.24 ft); width 2,140 mm (7.02 ft); ht 1,776 mm (5.83 ft); kerb wt 2,009 kg (4,429 lb).

Boot: Length 590 to 1,180 to 1,880 mm (1.94 to 3.87 to 6.17 ft); width 1,120 mm (3.67 ft); ht 816 mm (2.67 ft); vol 397 to 1,951 litres (14.02 to 68.90 cu.ft).

Engine and Drivetrain: Diesel; 1,969 cc; 4-cyl; twin turbo; 8-speed automatic; 4WD.

Power: 225 hp @ 4,250 rpm; max torque 470 Nm (347 lb.ft) @ 1,750-2,500 rpm.

Performance:

0-60 mph: 7.4 secs.

Top speed: 137 mph.

MPG: On test 38.0; official Combined 48.7; tank 71 litres.

Emissions and taxation: CO2 149 g/km; Road Tax Band F; VED £145; BIK 27%; Euro 6 emissions.

Insurance Group: 33.

Price: £45,750; as tested with options £50,325.

Rivals (seven-seater prices from): Audi Q7 quattro £47,610; BMW X5 £45,855; Land Rover Discovery £40,960.