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Volvo's latest XC40 SUV, V60 estate and a new 1.5 litre engine – First Impressions

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Big Sales for Volvo's smaller SUV and new 1.5 litre engine for 2019.

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) tells all...

With the September new registration plate month over, The Paris Motor Show finished, diesel engine vilification ongoing, not to mention Brexit and oh yes the Government's Autumn Budget, it is still that time of year when car manufacturers need to roll out their 2019 model ranges.

Volvo UK has just done that for their 2019 model year range, no totally new models yet, but lots of specification and updated WLTP-compliant engine changes.



Globally Volvo is on target for a fifth record year of sales growth, beating last year's total of 571,577 registrations. In the UK it's a similar picture with last year's sales total of 46,139 sales on course to be beaten with 37,506 registrations in the first nine months of this year towards a target of around 50,000 units for the full year. With more new models to come and greater availability of the new XC40 compact SUV, currently supply restricted, this is expected to grow to 60,000 registrations in 2019.

So what are the 2019 changes? Well Volvo wheeled out to the media their latest SUV - the XC40, and their latest new mid-sized estate the V60. Also lined up were the V90 and V90 Cross Country large estate, the XC60 mid-sized SUV and XC90 large SUV. New or updated engines available, depending on the model, included the 150 hp D3 diesel, 250 hp T5 petrol, 190 hp T4 petrol and three-cylinder 156 hp T3 petrol.

Chris Mullord, Volvo UK's product manager, said currently the XC60 mid-sized SUV is the brand's best-selling model range but the new smaller XC40 has a long order bank and is currently supply restricted because of huge global demand. He said, "We have sold 4,153 units of the XC40 so far this year and initially we were planning 12,000 units next year, but that has just been increased to 16,000 units which will make it our best-selling model range. The XC60 next year we are anticipating 12,500 UK sales and the large XC90 around 7,000 sales, so more than 50% of our 2019 sales are expected to be SUVs".

However first new model next year will be the Cross Country higher ground clearance versions of the recently launched V60 estate and ordering has just opened for February delivery. Next summer the new S60 mid-sized saloon arrives with the option of petrol or petrol hybrid power units - but no diesel engine option.

Chris Mullord commented, "We are no longer developing a new generation of diesel engines. Our current diesel engine line-up will be updated and modified as required to meet legislation but the long-term future for us is petrol, petrol-electric hybrids, plus PHEV plug-in hybrids and in two years time all-electric models will join the range".



He added that it was a bit of a surprise for the car industry to be told about the British Government's decision to axe the £2,500 Plug-in Car Grant for all PHEV plug-in hybrids from 9 November this year. "Around 15% of our SUV sales are PHEV models but at this moment we do not fully know the ordering and sales implications of this negative move by The Government. Even with the £2,500 grant removed we still think the potential fuel savings, lower VED tax and for company car drivers the advantageous low Benefit-in-Kind tax will still be incentives for customers, both retail and company car users, to enjoy the benefits PHEV vehicles offer."

The grant has helped to incentivise 160,000 sales of PHEVs in the UK over the last seven years. The Government is also reducing the purchase incentives for zero emission cars by a third. Coming so soon after the implementation of the new WLTP more realistic fuel consumption and CO2 emission homologation requirements, plus the fallout from whatever Brexit deal is reached with the EU, 2019 looks as though it will be a difficult year for the motor industry.

Volvo XC40 T3 1.5 litre compact SUV



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At the roll-out last week by Volvo UK of their 2019 model year latest models, spec levels and engines I opted to try their latest new addition to their SUV range - the XC40 with their latest new engine, the T3 1.5 litre 156 hp three-cylinder turbo petrol engine.

In 2019 the XC40 SUV is expected to become their best-selling model range in the UK, with the new 1.5 T3 engine potentially becoming the most popular for retail customers. However there is a wide range of power units on offer and in addition to the new 1.5 litre T3 petrol with its standard manual gearbox and FWD (front wheel drive) there are the petrol 2.0 litre, four-cylinder T4 190 hp and T5 247 hp units, both with automatic transmissions and with AWD (all wheel drive). For diesel users there is the choice of the D3 150 hp FWD manual or



auto and AWD automatic and the D4 190 hp automatic with AWD. Petrol units are expected to account for 60% of XC40 UK sales with 70% of total sales going to retail customers.

Depending on the engine chosen there are Momentum, R-Design and Inscription main specification levels, with Pro additional levels for all three. The R-Design/ Pro levels will account for 45% of sales, Momentum/Pro 30% and Inscription/Pro 25%. Prices range through 38 derivatives from £27,610 up to £37,620 but there is a long list of extra cost option packs and accessories that can increase those prices considerably. Personal Contract Purchase prices start from £299 over a 48 month period and it's the same price for Personal Contract Hire but over 36 months. The XC40's main competitors are the Audi Q3, BMW X1 and Mercedes-Benz GLA.

The XC40 we reviewed earlier this year by me when the first UK deliveries arrived but the new 1.5 litre T3 petrol engine has just joined the line-up so that is the model I am reviewing. To be precise it's potentially the future best-selling model, the T3 R-Design manual FWD priced at £29,460.



The triple cylinder 1.5 litre turbo petrol unit with 156 hp starts up with a distinctive off-beat engine note but soon smoothes out to a more harmonious tone, it's sharp, responsive and willing providing the full rev range is used. There is a healthy 265 Nm (195 lb.ft) of torque from 1,850 to 3,850 rpm, so it has strong and responsive mid-range performance. Although acceleration is brisk from standstill, zero to 60 mph in 9.0 seconds, to obtain the best response, say a rolling start accelerating out of a junction or negotiating a roundabout, the engine revs need to be kept in that powerband, drop below 1,850 rpm and a lower gear ratio has to be selected to get the turbo spinning again. That said, at low speeds and in stop-start traffic conditions the engine remained flexible and smooth enough not to be irritating. On the open road once in the powerband the engine was at its best and a top speed of 124 mph is quoted. But at times on hills and overtaking slower 50-60 mph traffic a step or two down the gearbox was needed to keep up momentum. There is the usual function of



selectable driving modes with Comfort being the start-up default setting. The six-speed manual gearbox is slick and precise to use and it will need to be used frequently.

For the all important fuel economy figure, in the new WLTP compliant Combined Cycle and fitted with 19-inch optional alloy wheels, the figure is 44.8 mpg and on my brief test drive around the busy roads near Birmingham Airport the figure was 38.3 mpg. With CO2 emissions of 146 g/km VED First Year road tax costs £205 before the £140 Standard rate is applied and company car drivers will pay 29% Benefit-in-Kind tax.

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With Volvo's new 1.5 litre power unit in this model, the purchase cost savings and lower running costs, with only a relatively small loss in performance over the T4 190 hp unit, make this an affordable way into the must-have XC40 range. However the T4 unit gets an automatic gearbox and AWD as standard but it costs £4,460 extra to buy and the taxes are higher. If you can live with a manual gearbox and two wheel drive the new T3 1.5 litre unit is the affordable way to go, and you get all the smart exterior looks of the new XC40 compact SUV and the same interior high quality and trendy Scandi chic design of more powerful versions.

For: New more affordable petrol engine option for this award winning range, high specification, comprehensive safety and driving support systems, Scandi-chic interior design, classy kerb appeal, comfortable ride.

Against: Engine lacks low down torque and needs to be worked hard for higher overtaking speeds, engine note is noisy at tickover on start up, too many functions are operated via the touchscreen, ungenerous warranty.



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

Volvo XC40 T3 R-Design compact SUV.

Price: £29,460.

Engine/transmission: 1.5 litre, three cylinder turbo petrol, 156 hp, 265 Nm (195 lb.ft) of torque from 1,850 rpm, six speed manual, front wheel drive.



Performance: 124 mph; 0-60mph 9.0 seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle 44.8 mpg (38.3 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 146 g/km, VED First Year road tax £205 then £140 Standard rate, BiK company car tax 29%.

Insurance Group: 22E.

Warranty: 3Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,425 mm (14.52 ft), W 1,910 mm (6.27 ft), H 1,658 mm (5.44 ft), wheelbase 2,702 mm (8.86 ft), boot/load space 460 to 1,336 litres (16.24 to 47.18 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,600 kg (3,527 ft), five doors/five seats.