

Road Beat: Volvo XC60 T6 – more than just safe



The Volvo XC60 T6 is more than just a safe ride.
Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

When many people think of Volvo, they think of the model 544 (see Anne Savoy's car in Bull Durham) which reminds me of my family's 1947 Chrysler Windsor. Or they think of the pure three box design of the 144 series which meant first series, four cylinders and four doors. The two-door model was a 142 and the five-door wagon was a 145. Volvo made well over a million of those ubiquitous vehicles in the 1960s and '70s.

Interestingly, those old 140 series, some with over a million

miles (it's hard to kill a Swedish tank), are still on the road and have a couple of things in common with the beautiful XC60. Both are powered by a 2 liter four banger and have a length of 183 inches. But the XC60 has a long wheelbase of 109 inches compared to the 102 inches of the 140 series. And where the 144 engine pounded out 101 hp, this new XC60 pumps out an astounding 302 hp. More on that later.

While the new XC60 is considered a midsize CUV, it is only a couple of inches longer than some compact CUVs. What make the XC60 feel big is its midsize width of 74 inches, so once ensconced in its fabulously comfortable seat, it feels more substantial and spacious. And were just warming up here.

Many of you know Volvo has gone through some hard times, but its sales are growing faster than almost every other manufacturer with worldwide sales expected to top a million vehicles this year. While the Chinese auto company Geely bought Volvo for a song, they haven't moved Volvo production which are built in Sweden and Belgium.



Specifications

Price \$46,350 to \$53,555

Engine

2.0L DOHC, 16 valve supercharged and turbocharged inline four 302 hp @ 5,700 rpm

295 lb.-ft. of torque @

2,100-4,800 rpm

Transmission

Eight speed torque converter automatic

Configuration

Transverse front engine/FWD/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 109.2

Length 182.8 inches

Width 74.4 inches

Height 67.4 inches

Ground clearance 9.1 inches

Track (f/r) 64.3/62.4 inches

Weight 4,234 pounds

Fuel capacity 18.5 gallons

Cargo capacity 62.4 cubic feet

Max Trailer weight 4,400 pounds

Turning circle 38.4 feet

Co-efficient of drag 0.35

Performance

0-60 mph 6.07 seconds

50-70 mph 3.39 seconds

50-70 mph (up 6-7 % grade) 4.95 seconds

Top speed-Well into triple digits and who really cares anymore

Fuel economy EPA rated 20/27/22 mpg city/highway/combined. Expect 22-23 mpg in rural country/suburban driving and 30 mpg on a level highway at legal speeds.

Volvos are great looking vehicles especially the new XC60, XC90 and S90. Smooth soft lines have lots of muscle built in. Just look at the shoulders on this XC60. Its strong front end and smooth transitions highlight its perfect proportions along

with a superb window/cabin line. It is one curvaceous ride now a far cry from its historical start mentioned above. About the only four-sided design input is the traditional Volvo grille which resembles a soft rectangle. One of the beauties of its design is that it is quite sophisticated in its shape without being complicated. In other words, there are not a lot of useless lines to crap it up.

Now to its "2" liter powerplant. This is no ordinary turbocharged four banger, but follows in the footsteps of some great aviation radial engines which were both mechanically supercharged and turbo charged so the engine could still develop sea level horsepower at high altitudes. While this Volvo won't see the altitudes of a B-17 or P-47, my Volvo ride did climb to about 7,400 feet with no loss of its massive performance.

This little DOHC, 16 valve mill with its high compression (10.3:1) and two blowers belts out 302 hp at just 5,700 rpm and 295 pounds of twist from 2,100 to 4,800 rpm. Hook that up to a swift/slick shifting eight speed torque converter auto cog swapper and this thing will rocket to 60 mph in a miniscule 6.07 seconds. If that isn't quick enough, then how about 50-70 mph simulated passes in 3.39 seconds and that same task up a 6-7 percent grade happens in less than five seconds (4.95 to be exact). Because of the instantaneous response of a supercharger, there is absolutely NO turbo lag. None, zero, zip, nada. In fact, this engine is so responsive, an unprepared strong tip in will snap a few necks. Hit the gas and you are in the next county. If you want to view this technical marvel, Volvo has the best hood release system in the business. Your mechanic will love you for this. But then again, as to looking at an engine, do you know anyone who drives with their hood open? I certainly do not.

And with all-wheel drive there is no wheelspin or torque steer as would be a FWD model. AWD is a must for the XC60, even if you live in Palm Springs. It improves most everything about

the drive and handling.

A couple of points. First this is not the best sounding four, under load at below 2,000 rpm it was a bit coarse sounding almost diesel like. And that can be exacerbated by the manual mode of this slick tranny which allows you to control it like a true manual. I know of no other auto that allows such complete control in manual. It is a sequential manual and whatever gear you select; it will stay in that gear until a stop when it will shift back to first gear. But if you select eighth gear going up a grade, it will not downshift if it lugs and then you will notice the coarseness when rpms drop off to 1,500 or so. Top gear is designed for fuel economy as the engine spins just 1,900 rpm at 70 mph, but going up a steep grade it needs seventh or sixth gear which are not quite as tall. Most people will operate in "D" and this never becomes an issue. The aggressively programmed tranny (designed to up shift quickly) will keep your ride smooth and quiet. This is really a non-issue. I prefer the way Volvo set up this XC60.

Fuel economy is actually good. EPA numbers show 20/27/22 mpg in city/highway/combined regime. But as usual, at a steady 70 mph on cruise control XC60 returned solid 30 mpg. Overall it averaged 22 mpg and on a round trip to South Lake Tahoe and back to Placerville it averaged exactly 25 mpg. Five years ago it would be considered a fuel miser, but today it's about average, but remember its performance is top of the class. And while its size is diminutive, it still tips the scale at a healthy 4,234 pounds. It's larger 18.5-gallon fuel tank will outlast your tank on road trips.

Handling is very good as XC60 uses state of the art four-wheel independent suspension with 20X8 inch alloys shod with wide 255/45 series tires. XC60 has oodles of grip and when coupled with limited body roll, it goes around corners like a sporty sedan. Steering has a slightly numb feeling which means more driver attention is necessary when pushing the XC60 hard, but it will willingly comply to your

commands. It will surprise most drivers.

Ride is on the firm side. There is no float and little head tossing. But it is a smooth mover swallowing the worst road conditions with aplomb. There is no wind or road noise and when the tranny is left to do its job without human interference, the engine is smooth and quiet.

Volvo is second to none when it comes to safety. About every safety acronym ever thought of is standard. It was first in automatic braking about 10 years ago and safety continues as its prime objective. Low speed collision avoidance is standard with City Safety and Collision Warning with Full Auto Brake that comes with the Advance package (\$2,500). It also comes with Lane Departure Warning, laser cruise control, Active High beams and so much more. Xenon headlights were fantastic with a wide flat low beam and a broad distance high beam.

And then there is the interior. Volvo leathers are about the thickest and softest in the industry with some of the most comfortable accommodations in the business. There have been many instances where Volvo front seats have been found attached to an office chair pedestal. Rear seating is copious for three with excellent shoulder and leg room. Instrumentation is complete, the tach is a bit small and controlling the trip computer was difficult, but it did have a gallons per hour meter which was fun to play with. The center stack was especially clean and easy to use.

Cargo capacity behind the front row is over 62 cubic feet, about average for this group of CUVs but more than ample for most Home Depot or Lowe's runs.

Pricing is surprisingly inexpensive on a relative basis in that this near luxo or luxo ride XC60 T6 starts at \$46,350 plus \$995 for the boat from Ghent, Belgium, its final assembly factory. A majority of its parts come from Sweden or Belgium,

except the eight speed tranny is from Japan. My ride had three option packages totaling about \$5,400. It had a charge of \$560 for the fancy paint and the bargain of \$350 for the larger 20 inch wheels. It totaled \$53,555, all in. If you are thinking German or Japanese luxu CUVs, you need to look at Volvo.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.