

Road Beat: Scoot, speed, safety, style, sumptuousness and civility



The 2018 Volvo XC60 full of superlatives for the driver.
Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Let's face it, I like alliterations. I know, civility starts with a "c," but it sounds like an "s." But this new Volvo meets all the criteria of the title of this Road Beat. It is that good. Who would of thunk it from a company that used to build cars that were built like battleships and looked like boxes that were pieced together.

The Chinese company, Geely, that recently bought Volvo for a song ended up with the equivalent of Beethoven's Fifth, Sixth

and Seventh symphonies. And, yes, Volvos are still manufactured in Gothenburg, Sweden.

Actually, for the past 15 years, Volvo has produced some stylish vehicles starting with the second generation S80 and the first XC90. Now their lineup is replete with great looking rides like the new S90, the V90, the new XC40 and now the XC60 with its perfect proportions, superb window line, massive front end, broad shoulders and some rippling muscle. It is a great looking vehicle.

While a perfect small mid-size in length at 185 inches, XC60 is wide at 75 inches and its wheelbase is long at 112.8 inches. Standing at 65-inches tall, it looks bigger because of its massive shoulders and high character line. That expansiveness pays dividends in interior spaciousness.



Specifications

Price \$53,495 to about \$71,590

Engine 2.0L, DOHC, 16 valve supercharged and turbocharged inline four 313 hp at 5,700 rpm

296 lbs.-ft. of torque

Electric power system

87 hp, 10.4 kWh L-I battery

87 hp electric motor

Combined max power 400 hp

Transmission

Eight-speed torque converter automatic

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/FWD/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 112.8 inches

Length 184.6 inches

Width 75.4 inches

Height 65.3 inches

Track (f/r) 64.9/65.1 inches

Ground clearance 8.2 inches

Wading depth 15.7 inches

Weight 4,668 pounds

GVWR 5,863 pounds

Max trailer weight 4,628 pounds

Turning circle 35.4 feet

Steering lock to lock 3.0 turns

Performance

0-60 mph 4.99 seconds

50-70 mph 2.46 seconds

50-70 (uphill) 3.14 seconds

Top speed (manufacturer and quite believable) 144 mph

Fuel economy No EPA rating as of this date, but expect 26 mpg in suburban driving and about 30-31 mpg on a level highway at legal speeds.

Volvo is the only auto manufacturer that combines supercharging and turbocharging simultaneously to enhance the power of their engines, a common technique used in aircraft

engines starting in the late 1930s, which used supercharging and turbocharging in massive radial engines like those that powered the B-17 Flying Fortress. As a result, this Volvo with just a 2.0L inline DOHC, 16 valve inline four-cylinder engine produced 313 hp at a low 5,700 rpm and 296 pounds of twist from about 1,600-4,000 rpm.

But Volvo isn't done yet as with the T8-E AWD model that was my tester. Volvo adds a huge kicker, a 10.4 kWh L-I battery system located centrally in the tunnel area of the car and an electric motor that can add up to 87 hp which drives the rear wheels and brings the combined power to 400 hp and 472 pounds of twist. That is massive power. This T8-E is a full-on plug in hybrid that is capable of about 25-30 miles of pure electric driving and even in a low state of charge is capable of pure electric motoring at over 70 mph.

Power is transmitted through a slick 8-speed cog-swapper to all four wheels and it is prodigious power with an average 0-60 mph time of just 4.99 seconds. That is world-class performance. Passing performance is also world-class with 50-70 mph simulated passes averaged a scant 2.46 seconds and a steep grade only slows that exercise to 3.14 seconds. If the Volvo has even small wings, it would fly. Nail the throttle and it will get your attention in a nano second with its ferociousness. This is an extremely high-performance vehicle and it does this while weighing 4,668 pounds.

Performance on pure electric also is quite satisfying with strong linear acceleration.

With the PHEV system, this Volvo gives you very good fuel economy. There are no EPA numbers yet, however my tester averaged 26.1 mpg over about 450 miles of varied driving including plenty of dipping into that delicious throttle. On a level highway at 70 mph on cruise control without much battery, the XC60 averaged 31.6 mpg in a two-way run. In my run from Placerville to Reno via Highway 50 and Echo Summit,

the big Volvo averaged 28.9 mpg. But the battery was all done a couple of miles short of Kyburz on the outbound leg, meaning it was good for about 30-35 miles of pure electric. But remember from Pollock Pines to Ice House Road is mostly downhill, which regenerates the battery. However, I got about a quarter of the battery back from Echo Summit into South Lake Tahoe and in the nine-mile downhill run from Spooner Summit into Carson City the Volvo recaptured about a one-third of the battery which allowed for electric motoring in the Carson City area. The fuel tank could be larger at just 13.2 gallons.

On pure EV, the Volvo has decent performance and will motor along at 70 plus mph for about 20-25 miles.

Think about it. Here is a vehicle that can blast from 0-60 mph in less than 5 seconds and average 25-26 mpg in suburban driving. That is amazing.

But not everything is perfect. While this XC60 has state of the art suspension with double wishbones up front and optional four-corner air suspension in the rear which provided one of the best riding vehicles the Road Beat has ever encountered, because of all the electronic interventions handling feels a bit artificial. All the credentials are there, like steering that is three turns lock to lock, huge 20-inch alloys shod with 255/45 rubber and tremendous cornering power and grip, it just needs guidance as "feel" is the missing component. But point it and it will obey your commands, just not in a natural fashion.

But it's the ride quality that the XC90 has that will wow you. It is extremely quiet and it handles road imperfections in a remarkable manner. You have to experience it to understand, that's how good it is. And it doesn't float. Kudos to Volvo. There is no tire, mechanical or wind noise as well.

Volvos are safe and the XC60 is no exception. It has just about every conceivable mechanical and electronic safety

intervention device known to man. Lane departure warning and lane keep assist, check. Semi-autonomous driving is also touted. Surround view camera, check. Braking intervention, something invented by Volvo, check. LED Headlights with auto high beam are fantastic. But never let these systems lull you into forgetting as driver attention and awareness are the largest and most important safety factors.

I have written glowingly about Volvo interiors and this new XC90 follows in that tradition of the finest leathers and seats. A thick, dark saddle leather resides on the seating surfaces which are shaped for maximum comfort, never mind their superb design. While all the instrumentation is there, including a tach which appears in Sport Mode, it is the computer like center stack vertical screen that is just too confusing. Perhaps after a month it would become second nature, but after a week and this is my third time with this system, it is still difficult to operate and at times downright frustrating.

In a car that exudes safety, this system is most distracting and the learning curve is long and difficult and perhaps dangerous in its distractions. Nothing like knobs and buttons.

Interior volume is also cavernous. Going to Home Depot could be dangerous to your bank account.

And then again, so could be buying this Volvo with a base of \$52,500. plus \$995 for the boat from Gothenburg, Sweden. While that price is reasonable, my test was loaded up with about \$18,000 in options bringing the total to a rather shocking \$71,590. Included in that \$18 large were a Bowers and Wilkins sound system (\$3,200) and air suspension (\$1,800) which I would go for. The Inscription package added \$3,800, the Convenience package added \$2,000 (how inconvenient), the Luxury seat pack adds \$3,000 (there's your nappa leather upgrade), the Advanced pack with its 360-degree view is \$1,800 and the Vision pack is \$1,100.

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.