

# Road Beat: Volvo XC40 has room for improvement



Volvo XC40 has great looks and design, but disconnected.  
Photos/Larry Weitzman

**By Larry Weitzman**

Volvo has been on a serious roll with some new product that is off the charts like the new S90, V90, XC90 and XC60 and their sales growth indicates renewed customer enthusiasm. But now we have the new XC40 which was rewarded recently with the European Car of the Year for 2018. So, it was with much anticipation that I awaited the arrival of the new XC40.

Its boxy design didn't disappoint with a crisp, up right two box look with very pleasing lines especially in black as the rear cabin behind the side window is always in black giving the all black car a more cohesive appearance. XC40 is a small

vehicle (174 inches) about half a foot shorter than your average compact car. At 65 inches tall it looks even shorter. It is beamy at 73 inches. But with that wide girth, front and rear tracks measure a very wide 63 and 64 inches respectively which bodes for excellent handling.

Under the hood of my T5 AWD R-Design is the familiar Volvo 2.0L DOHC, 16 valve turbocharged inline four-cylinder engine knocking out 248 hp at a low 5,500 rpm and 258 pounds of twist at 1,800 rpm connected to an eight-speed torque converter auto cog-swapper. All four wheels get driven but it is an on-demand system with a front bias, but there was absolutely no torque steer. This same engine with the addition of mechanical supercharging in Volvo's larger models belts out about 320 hp with a commensurate increase in twist.

Performance is hampered by lag, either by throttle mapping (to improve fuel economy) or turbo lag or both. In normal driving XC40 is a bit of a dog taking 8.23 seconds to achieve 0-60 mph. Fifty to 70 mph runs level and up a steep grade averaged 4.40 and 6.76 seconds respectively. Pretty slobby performance for a \$38,000 compact near luxo CUV. However, there is a way to change the driving dynamics by selecting the drive mode button inconspicuously placed among the climate control buttons which allows you to go from eco, comfort normal or dynamic driving which consists of a remapping of the powertrain and sharpens up the response although there is still some lag at tip in. Times dropped to 7.45/4.16/6.27 seconds respectively making the Volvo times more respectable in the dynamic mode.



### **Specifications**

**Price** \$37,700 to about \$45,000

**Engine** 2.0L DOHC, 16 valve, turbo charged, direct injected inline four 248 hp @ 5,500 rpm  
258 lb.-ft. of torque @ 1,800 rpm

### **Transmission**

Eight-speed torque converter automatic

### **Configuration**

Transverse mounted front engine/AWD

### **Dimensions**

Wheelbase 106.4 inches

Length 174.2 inches

Width 73.3 inches

Height 65.0 inches

Track (f/r) 63.0/64.0 inches

Ground clearance 8.3 inches

Max wading limit 17.7 inches

Weight 3,825 pounds

GVWR 4,960 pounds

Fuel capacity 14.25 gallons

Steering lock to lock 2.7 turns

Turning circle (curb to curb) 37.4 feet

Wheels 20X8 inch alloys

Tires 245/45X20

Cargo capacity (rear seats up/down) 47.2/20/7 cubic feet

Max trailer tow weight 4,629 pounds

### **Performance**

0-60 mph 7.48 seconds

50-70 mph 4.16 seconds

50-70 up (6-7 percent grade) 6.27

Top speed Imagine a Volvo with a factory top speed of 143 mph?

Fuel economy EPA rated at 23/31/26 mpg city/highway/combined.

Expect about 23-26 mpg in rural/suburban driving and 33 mpg on the highway at legal speeds.

Driving the Volvo is different. Every time the brake is applied coming to a full stop a brake hold remains in place until the throttle is applied. And it can be abrupt. The car will not creep forward in drive or backwards when in reverse making control a bit disconcerting. There is noticeable engine or turbo lag not experienced with the turbo-supercharged version of this engine. Once underway, say from 10 mph, XC40 feels pretty sprightly. Hard throttle produces some engine noise, sometimes coarse, and certainly not pleasant.

EPA rates the XC40 at 23/31/26 mpg city/highway/combined. With the engine spinning a low 1,900 rpm at 70 mph, it is inaudible

under light throttle conditions. In a two-way run it averaged 33 mpg and overall 23-26 mpg was the norm. In a 200-mile trip to Carson City the XC40 averaged 26.4 mpg but it was in a 45-minute traffic jam so it should have averaged at least an mpg or more even though it has an automatic engine stop feature which I could not disable even pushing the button to stop the auto stop feature. One other disconcerting feature of this auto engine stop feature was auto A/C stop feature which wasn't exactly pleasant in 100-degree weather, especially in my all black XC40.

Handling is quite sharp bolstered by state of the art four-wheel independent suspension, wide track, quick steering at 2.7 turns lock to lock and big 20-inch wheels shod with serious 245/45 x 20 inches. The 20-inch wheels are an \$800 upgrade over the standard R-Design nineteens. Changing directions in this 3,825-pound ride should be easy but it is impeded by electronic intervention which I couldn't seem to turn off. Everything in this car, including the owner's manual is contained in the computer operated by a large 12-inch touch screen which sometimes didn't respond to my touch. I guess I didn't have the "right" touch. Most if not all systems are handled through the center touch screen. Maybe Volvo is trying to save trees.

Back to handling and while there was significant cornering power when pushing the XC40 hard especially near a painted line in the road, you could feel the steering wheel slightly vibrating or counter steering on its own. Very disconcerting. I couldn't find a way to turn it off.

Ride quality was good, being smooth as long as the throttle isn't more than half way down and then noise will intercede. It rides very smooth and takes bumps very well. There is no wind and little road noise.

Safety is almost overdone. Yes, it has every acronym and safety feature known to man and Martians alike. But sometimes

intervene too early. Brakes are powerful except for the brake hold feature then they are too powerful. LED Headlights are excellent.

Inside is a different Volvo interior. Always of the highest quality and best leathers, my tester looked like the San Francisco Giants with its Nappa black leather super comfortable seats and bright orange/reddish carpet. Instrumentation is all electronic with a big speedo and tach, but in Volvo's effort to be different, the trip computer is in the lower part of the tach and needs to be activated with a button push on the steering wheel. Other wise only average fuel econ is displayed. I prefer more info.

Rear seating is comfortable with good room, but while the cargo space appears very large the numbers provided by Volvo aren't at 47 cubes behind the first row and about 21 cubes behind the second row. It might be due to Volvo's measuring system. Fuel capacity is also small at 14.25 gallons.

Pricing for the T5 AD R-Design \$37,700 plus \$995 for boat from Europe. Three packages and some other options drove the Monroney to \$45,340. Enough said, too much electronic intervention hurts an otherwise outstanding design.

*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.*