

Volvo has long held a leadership position in automotive safety. But have you noticed that Volvo has added a major dose of performance to many of its most popular models?

In 2003 the S60-R debuted, carrying a 300-horsepower turbocharged 5-cylinder engine. Together with upgrades in suspension and interior components, this beauty led the way in performance for Volvo's current generation.

For 2005 the smaller S40 was redesigned to reflect the lines of the S60, and is available with Volvo's 2.4L, 218-horsepower turbocharged engine. Since it weighs about 400 pounds less than the S60, its acceleration is strong, with a 0-60 acceleration time of 6.8 seconds according to *Motor Trend*.

The new S40 is sporty and sleek, displaying clean-cut lines with a touch of Scandinavian conservatism.

Inside you'll find comfortable seating for four; five fit in a pinch. Instrument lighting is commendable, with practically every control identified for nighttime driving safety and convenience. Materials are good quality and conveniences abound.

How does it drive? Overall, it's great fun. The T5 variant comes standard with the turbo, AWD, 6-speed stick and sport suspension. A 5-speed automatic is optional. Mine had the 6-speed and proved itself a highly competent handler on local mountain



roads. Testing the turbo's low-end torque, I allowed the engine to drop down to 1000 rpm in 6th gear, and then gave it a little gas. Amazingly, the T5 simply pulled away smoothly, with no shuddering. Can't beat that.

My only complaint with the T5 model was its overly stiff ride and harshness over irregular road surfaces. Volvo might look at dialing in a bit more softness in initial compress-



Volvo S40 T5 and XC90 V-8 New Volvos Combine Muscle & Safety

sion damping, while maintaining the overall firmness that made smooth S-curves so much fun.

If you don't need the turbo's extra power, the standard S40 with 168 horsepower has a more forgiving suspension.

The S40 T5 is priced at \$28,395 including destination fees. My loaded tester totaled \$31,965. With the 6-speed, it is EPA-rated at 19-city, 27-highway mpg. With my usual mix of city, freeway and winding mountain roads I averaged 23.3 mpg. Pretty reasonable considering all the fun I had.

Continuing Volvo's commitment to adding major performance fun to its lineup, the XC90 sport utility vehicle gained more power by adding a 4.4 liter 311-horsepower V8.

The all-aluminum engine is a narrower 60-degree design built by Yamaha (typically V8 engines measure 90 degrees between cylinder banks). The narrow dimensions were specified so that existing front-end crumple zones could be maintained. Equipped with balance shafts, the engine is not only smooth, but also makes beautiful music when you wind it out. The only transmission offered for this AWD SUV is a 6-speed automatic with Geartronic manual control. Acceleration is impressive for a 4,600-pound vehicle, with a Volvo-stated 0-60 time of 6.9 seconds.


Courtesy of Volvo, I was given the opportunity to drive the new XC90 V8 on an all-day outing in Arizona's

gorgeous back country. Highway cruising was quiet, smooth and comfortable. Over rougher terrain the XC90 V8 displayed a high level of competence, and it should certainly satisfy most owner's need for mild to moderate off-road exploring.

All XC90s come with standard roll stability control, electronic stability control, and curtain airbags on all rows of seats for added head protection. An optional rear seat entertainment system (\$1,995) keeps the kids occupied with two 7-inch screens tucked into the front backrests.

Interior design and materials were up to Volvo's usual high standards. Choose between five- or seven-seat configurations depending on your needs. Either way, the interior coddles its occupants and I found it all-day comfortable.

The V8 is priced at \$45,395 plus options. With a 21-gallon fuel tank and low-rpm cruising thanks to the overdrive 6-speed auto, long-range touring awaits, and gas mileage should be towards the upper end within its peer group.

Wherever you look in the Volvo lineup these days, it's clear that considerably more power and performance has been made available throughout. That, combined with a proven safety record, bodes well for Volvo's future among performance seekers of all types. 

Mike Cooney is a lifelong auto enthusiast living and writing in Southern California. Comments are welcome at Michael@GlobalBrand.com.