



Volvo V40

Too good to be true?

Review | Volvo faced a major problem. The V50 was a good car. How does one improve on a proven success? And how does one make a new model that is so much better that even people who usually choose another brand now opt for a Volvo? The solution: set higher goals than ever before. According to Volvo the new V40 is the most dynamic, most frugal and the safest car in its class. Too good to be true?

It seems unlogical that the successor of the Volvo "V50" is named "V40". Logic demands that a newer, better model answers to a higher number. Yet Volvo has a logical explanation: despite the trend, the V40 is smaller than the V50. This modesty even reflects in its number.

The goal was to make the V40 the most dynamic and at the same the most frugal car in its class. This is easier to realise with a small rather than with a large vehicle.

Design

However, the V40 looks larger than its predecessor. All lines in the front and rear point outwards to emphasise width. Features like LED sidelights draw the eyes to the side of the car, giving the V40 a firm stance.



These are all tricks used by most carmakers. Volvo takes it one step further by introducing a pedestrian's airbag on the outside of the car. This accomplishes much more than improving safety for pedestrians; it gives the designer more freedom.

Manufacturers are obligated by law to keep a certain distance between the engine and the bonnet, so that the bonnet absorbs the force if a pedestrian is ever hit by the car. Since the outside airbag now softens that blow, Volvo still obliges while being able to lower the bonnet. This in turn allows for a lower shoulder line

and even a lower roofline.

What seems like just another safety feature, is in fact the whole secret behind the design of the V40. The long, elegant silhouette doesn't just improve looks, it also increases aerodynamics.



Interior

The sleek lines on the outside do not go on the expense of the room on the inside. The space in the front is ample, and as usual with Volvo, the seats are sublime. Even more than before, the engineers have combined several kinds of foam to make the seats either soft or firm in exactly the right places.

The same principle is applied on the back seat, so that even the rear passengers sit more comfortably than in the average car. The rear seats have been positioned slightly to the middle, so that the passengers have a free view to the front rather than a clear view of the front headrests. Still, comfort in the back strongly depends on the posture of the driver and front passenger. While legroom is fine, headroom leaves something to be desired.



While the V40 looks like an estate car, the boot space is poor for a car of this size. Even small hatchbacks offer more luggage space. Because of the narrow tailgate, the boot is quite hard to reach.

Spec levels

The atmosphere in the cabin is as Scandinavian as it gets. Of course the V40 can be fitted with an integrated audio, video, communication and navigation system. Both a mobile phone and mp3-player can be connected by USB and Bluetooth. The optional "high end" audio system sounds even warmer and much clearer than in the top spec V60. At high volume the amplifier runs out of juice and the sound will distort.



Just like all other new Volvos, the V40 will automatically brake for objects. Both a radar and a camera constantly scan the surroundings. If the driver approaches a slower (or stationary) object, a red light on top of the dashboard flashes. Since this warning light is reflected in the windscreen, it is impossible to ignore. When the driver still does not brake, a warning sounds as well.

The speedometer and rev counter have been replaced by a display that mimics both dials. The driver can choose one of three themes which do not just differ in colour, but also in functionality. When the sporty mode is engaged, the rev counter takes centre stage and the dials turn red. In economy mode the driver is actively encouraged to save fuel. A gauge next to the trip computer shows the average fuel consumption. Driving consistently and economically is rewarded by a stylish "E" in the display.

Safety

The V40 wouldn't be a true Volvo without extra attention to safety. Although the V40 is the "small" Volvo, it can be fitted with all safety features the brand has on offer. This includes a camera that reads traffic signs and shows the actual speed limit next to the speedometer as a reminder to the driver. When accidentally crossing the lines on the road, the steering wheel wobbles as if the car hits a curb.



In the rare case both warnings are being ignored, the V40 will automatically brake to prevent an accident with a pedestrian (and only a pedestrian!). While other Volvos will brake at speeds of 18 mph and lower, the V40 will assist at speeds up to 31 mph.

Another new feature is a radar in the rear bumper. This helps to prevent accidents when reversing out of

a parking space (although simply parking in reverse is still much safer).

Diesel

How frugal the V40 is, strongly depends on the chosen power train. In theory, the V40 is the most frugal car in its class with the "D2" engine under the bonnet (CO2 emissions: 94 grams per kilometre).



Once on the road, it is obvious why the D2 is so economical. It seems almost hesitant to perform, especially when setting off from standstill as it requires some persuasion. Because the clutch has little to no feedback, driving off with the D2 takes some skill. Once on the go, the output of 115 PS / 270 Nm is more than enough. The D2 comes along with the traffic nicely and even overtaking slower vehicles is no problem.

The "D4" is the bigger diesel engine, delivering 177 PS and 400 Nm of torque. This larger diesel is also more quiet and refined. Its power is abundant and available at just about every engine speed. The V40 D4 is so eager to perform that a "D5" is not expected for the near future.



Despite its high output, fuel consumption is low. The test drive took 39 mpg. That is much higher than Volvo's promise of 64, yet on a very demanding track (mountains, city traffic) still a fair score.

Petrol

With the "T4" petrol engine under the bonnet, the V40 turns into a real party animal. While the diesel engines take some time to accelerate, the T4 reacts fiercely on even the slightest touch of the throttle.



The test car was fitted with a "Powershift" automatic gearbox. It has a dual clutch, making it shift faster than even a racing car driver ever could. The electronics almost seem to predict the driver's wishes. When driving calmly a high gear is engaged as quickly as possible to save fuel and improve comfort. When opening the throttle just a tad more, the automatic gearbox shifts down a notch for maximum performance.

Handling

Volvo's final promise for the V40 is dynamic handling. To accomplish this, Volvo made the V40 more rigid and lowered its centre of gravity. This doesn't just improve safety, it also prevents the bodywork from "bending" in the corner. The result is obvious: the V40 handles very well and is more rewarding to drive when driving faster. Automatically, the driver increases the speed to be able to enjoy the exceptional handling even more.

The V40 can also be fitted with an optional sports suspension. This lowers the car by 10 mm, while firmer dampers make the car noticeably more agile.



Conclusion

It sounds too good to be true: the new Volvo V40 is said to be safer, more dynamic and at the same time more economical than every other car on the market. To start with economy: the V40 is only frugal in theory. Because of the sluggish character of the D2 engine, its needs to work very hard to perform. This makes it difficult to drive as economically as the brochure promises.

When it comes to safety, the V40 is very convincing. A wide array of active safety features effectively prevent accidents. The innovative pedestrian airbag gave the designers more freedom and also improves safety another notch.

Whether the Volvo V40 is the best handling car in its class is a matter of personal taste. One thing is sure: compared to other Volvo models, the V40 is without a doubt the most dynamic family member. ■



Specifications

Volvo V40 D2 SE Lux

Size and weight



Length x width x height	437 x 180 x 144 cm
Wheelbase	265 cm
Kerb weight	1.292 kg
Trailer	650 kg
Trailer - braked	1.500 kg
Fuel capacity	40 l
Luggage space	335/1032 l
Tyre size	205/55R16

Engine and performance



Capacity	1969 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	120 PS @ 3750 rpm
Max torque	280 Nm @ 1500 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	10.5 secs
Top speed	190 km/h
Average mileage	3.2 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	3.7 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	2.9 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	82 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 24,870
Price base model	Â£ 19,345