



Volvo S40 (2004 - 2012)

It tastes so good as to make one want more

Review | The test report of the Volvo V50, the estate version of the S40, was called "charm offensive", for the S40 and V50 are the first of a whole new generation of Volvo's. Besides lots and lots of safety, this new generation proves to offer an undeniable amount of driving pleasure. A S40 with T5 turbo engine, the grandest level of equipment and all available options should definitely charm. The "taste"-run of the V50 made one want more, the S40 T5 offers everything Volvo has in store.

It actually doesn't fit Volvo's safety image at all. The previously tested V50 with 177 horsepower already seemed way too powerful for the right-minded devout father who wants to carry his family through the country in all safety. Fortunately Volvo recognised this and made sure the excess of horsepowers would purely offer suppleness and act as a good reserve for that once in a while where smooth overtaking on a single carriageway is needed. Other than that the V50, even with a 2.4 litre engine, remains an honest family car.



But what if the same car is leased by a demanding business driver that indeed wants the sensation of a fast car, but who is also attracted to the design and Volvo's safety image? For this connoisseur Volvo provides the 2.4 litre 5-cylinder with a turbo. This offers almost 50 horsepower extra. The same car then performs like a racecar, even though it still has the same sophisticated look.

Turbo engine

The last statement is not entirely appropriate for the

test vehicle. For this specimen literally all available options were ordered, including the sports package. This comprises of wheels with extra screw holes, which makes it obvious that this is not an 'honest' boy anymore. Very subtle are the solid double exhaust pipes that are half hidden under the shaped bodywork; just as if Volvo itself doubted whether something so flamboyant would be acceptable. The car has spoilers all the way round, including a huge one on the boot, which later turned out to be useful reference point for reverse parking. Obviously the spoiler is meant to keep maximum pressure on the rear wheels so as to guarantee road-holding even at extreme speeds.

And with this T5 it is all about extreme high speeds, Volvo-safety or not. Or maybe it isn't? A car capable of getting from 0 to 62.5 mph in 6 seconds is treated with a certain respect during the first miles. In this case however that is completely unnecessary. The T5 is just as easy and comfortable as any other S40. Any trace of aggression is hard to find and whoever doesn't know any better could not imagine what the turbo engine is capable of.

At first the T5 is mostly very strong and quiet. The power source is so quiet that many forget to change gears. During the first drive on the motorway the sixth gear initially seemed to be overlooked and the car appeared very quiet with just the five gears. In sixth gear the revs drop to diesel proportions. With just 1100 revs per minute the S40 drives smoothly and effortlessly over the tarmac at 62.5 mph. Fuel consumption then is 56.5 mpg. Whoever wants to drive economically in this fastest S40 is perfectly able to do so.

Horsepowers

Whoever doesn't can raise hell in a way that is unprecedented, not just for Volvo but for any business car. As opposed to traditional turbo engines, the S40 turbo builds the power up very gradually. Despite the enormous speed potential the T5 will never shoot off all at once, but fast acceleration for overtaking is no problem at all.

More imposing is it when the T5 is allowed to prove

itself at the "filter in test". The car is on the slip road of a petrol station at a walking pace until an easily recognisable car on the motorway passes at the same level. The aim is to filter in in front of this car, which is already at full speed. First gear ... accelerate ... second gear ... accelerate more and more ... filter in ... sixth gear ... nicely along with the rest of the traffic. Spectacular and not even a traffic offence. The T5 is successful on this test, where it is usually only the real sports cars that are capable of matching this result.



On the motorway too 70 mph is still a walking pace and much more "exotic" speeds are easily recordable. The fuel consumption meter, that earlier on displayed such friendly values, now has considerably less good news. The performance at that moment is impressive, even though the car is never uncontrollable or intimidating. Nevertheless the T5 is so fast that only real sports cars, along with all of their luxury problems, are faster.

Not now

And that is exactly the charm of a car like this one: a sports car has luxury problems (the initial price to start with) and for the S40 T5 the speed potential is nothing more than a pleasant extra. It can be switched off. Then, the S40 is as comfortable as can be expected of a business car of about £ 24.000 (excl. options).

While the engine of a sports car is always obviously audible, inside the S40 at best the characteristic sonorous sound of a 5-cylinder is heard in the

distance with a hint of a whistle from the turbo. Whenever no performance is needed, the engine is almost impossible to hear.

Road handling

Steering is pleasantly heavy and conducts, like a sports car, exactly what is going on under the front wheels. As with most brands, the top model offers the most luxury, but the smallest car offers the most pleasure. It is just like that with Volvo.

Road handling of this small Volvo is sublime. The car feels stable and solid without ever being massive or corpulent. Although the difference is small, the S40 offers just that little extra pleasure than the almost identical V50. Whoever doesn't care that much about this communicating with the car can discard that message and drive along with one hand on the wheel just as easily.



Interior

The interior provides the same luxury problem as that of a sports car, which Volvo could have omitted. The

legroom is fine, but storage space is minimal. The sports seats are upholstered in leather, which are not so soft that it makes the passengers disappear straight away. Strangely enough the headrests are not adjustable. Volvo, having an infinite wisdom as safety pioneers, has given this a lot of thought, but it remains awkward. Fortunately in practice it turns out that practically everyone is comfortable and experiences enough support from the headrests.

The backseat is comfortable too and has enough room for two adults. Still the S40 offers less room than most in this class. The luggage room isn't as big as usual for cars like this either. The storage space inside the car is minimal. The glove compartment is packed with the DVD-player of the navigation system and the instruction manual. The door pockets are almost an insult to the buyer since it is not even big enough to hold a pair of sunglasses.

On the other hand the dashboard is proof of ergonomics. Apart from the little wheels next to the ventilators, it is completely free from buttons and whiz bangs. The central console is an elegant sleek panel that curves from the dashboard to the floor. Behind the panel is a compartment, which is lit in the dark so that it literally jumps out (and the sunglasses can be stored in the end).



On the central console is found a whole range of rather small buttons that operate the climate control

system, the telephone and the audio system. Especially the latter deserves an honourable mention, for this "Premium Sound System" is of an extraordinary quality. While audio for many a car manufacturer is an afterthought and other manufacturers ask electronics specialists, that apparently do not like music, for help, Volvo does everything right. Audio lovers will enjoy this sound that can even compete with top class domestic audio systems. So why drive so fast if it is that comfortable to be in the car for a long time?

Conclusion

Volvo really did get the message. It is the thirty something year olds that choose the leased cars in the class of the S40. Volvo is warming up to them with a car that distinguishes itself from the masses in many ways without standing out in a negative way. Despite the great speed potential the S40 T5 looks like a typical business car. The interior appeals because of its recognisable Scandinavian freshness and logics. Only when it comes to space Volvo misses a beat, because with these outside measurements there should be more inside space. Safety still comes first at Volvo, but without compromising on driving pleasure or performance. ■



Specifications

Volvo S40 (2004 - 2012) T5 SE Sport

Size and weight



Length x width x height	447 x 177 x 145 cm
Wheelbase	264 cm
Kerb weight	1.354 kg
Trailer	700 kg
Trailer - braked	1.500 kg
Fuel capacity	62 l
Luggage space	404 l
Tyre size	

Engine and performance



Capacity	2521 cc
Cylinders / valves	5/4
Max power	220 PS @ 5000 rpm
Max torque	320 Nm @ 1500 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	6.8 secs
Top speed	240 km/h
Average mileage	8.7 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	12 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	6 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	208 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 23,895
Price base model	Â£ 13,750