

FIRST LOOK

This month's new cars

Swedish exoticica

Volvo's new S90 has been designed with a clean, crisp and fresh approach. Will it be enough to take on the competition?



Volvo's new S90 is a car that's set its sights firmly on the German luxury trio. Engineered, designed and configured to take on Audi's A6, BMW's 5-series and Mercedes's E-class, Volvo's new flagship however is very different from the competition. CEO Hakan Samuelsson, insists it isn't a me-too product. "We have an identity that's unlike the others, and we've got a new, genuinely Swedish look which is very elegant and Nordic."

The car's exterior styling, in fact, moves on from the heavy shouldered look of the earlier S80. The S90 uses bold lines and minimalistic detailing to help it look crisp and fresh. Some of the bits though are familiar. The nose of the car looks

very similar to that of the XC90. The long headlights with the 'Thor's hammer' LEDs look stunning, the concave grille protrudes out to give it a layered effect and the very short front overhang and vertical nose make the S90 look distinctive. Walk around the side of the car and you get more of the same, the new S90 now getting your attention with its smooth flanks. But this harmony is broken at the rear. The tail-lights seem a bit overdone and oversized. And the multitude of lines make the boot look a bit fussy too. One thing's for sure, you won't mistake this car for anything else.

What also sets it apart from the crowd is the stretched out, elongated look. Volvo designers say this is enhanced by pushing the cabin as far

back as possible; what they seek is a high front axle-to-dashboard ratio. The S90 also has an extremely long 2,941mm wheelbase.

This makes the car look long in beam and elegant to begin with and then, space inside the cabin benefits too. The problem is, this reduces torsional stiffness. Volvo engineers

'With the S90, Volvo is aiming to have best-in-class comfort.'

we spoke to during the reveal of the car, however, insisted that the S90 is well up on rigidity.

"Stiffness is important for many factors like ride comfort and handling, but it is also important for another factor, safety. And it is for this reason that the new S90 has been made extremely stiff."

Also, Volvo isn't chasing dynamically impressive cars like the BMW 3-series and others. What it is interested in is having best-in-class ride comfort, which it why it will use extremely high-strength boron steel in its construction. The S90 is also built on Volvo's new and flexible Scalable Platform Architecture, and this will bring all the benefits of modern construction. The car's 152mm of

ground clearance won't be enough for Indian conditions though; Volvo will raise the ride height of the car to make clearing large speed breakers and ramps easier.

On the inside, the cabin is very XC90-like. It gets an identical, large, portrait-layout touchscreen display, and the instrument panel, steering wheel and console between the seats are very similar too. This, immediately, means very high levels of quality with fit and finish almost on par with Audi.

This is also an interior you want to constantly touch and feel; the sumptuous leather is supple and beautifully 'fluffed up', and just like the leather, swatches of wood used also stand out, giving the dash a →



Oversized tail-lights and multitude of lines make the rear look fussy but distinctive.

Q&A THOMAS INGENLATH, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, DESIGN, VOLVO CARS

The S90 is more Scandinavian in its outlook, with cleaner lines and fewer details. Was it difficult to move up to this new design language?

We analysed moving to a more distinctive look four years ago, but it was clear that we did not necessarily deliver on that promise in the years that followed. Now we have. The XC90 showed that there is definitely a way to bring out a Scandinavian car built to our design sensibilities and at the same time, deliver on that premium feel. Earlier, a lot of people doubted that. They said, 'Oh, if you make it too simple then you will lose the premium feel', but it's the opposite. If you do it the right way, if you really show the materials, the perfection in the build, if you have the skill to really deliver on this clean and pure Scandinavian design, it works very well on luxury cars as well.



Will you evolve the design more as you move forward? Because there's a lot in common between the XC90 and this S90.

I think it is necessary to form a foundation to establish a kind of base. It would have been reckless to go out there with the S90 and to kind of contradict or put a question mark on what we've just done with the XC90. And then again, it is the 90 cluster, and the 90 cluster, of course, has its mission, its theme, its topic, and that is why those two cars top the range. And the S90, I think, is pushing the envelope already a bit with being much more advanced and avant-garde when you look at the interior or the rear end; it is much more experimental, so you can see that we will definitely not be static.

Will you use an evolved form of this language on the upcoming new V40?

Without wanting to give too much away, I see how car magazines illustrate the V40 or coming XC40; they just take the XC90 and they scale it down and then I have to laugh.

Will there be a four-door coupé, sort of like the Mercedes CLS, in the 90 range?

Well, there I have to say, we have one great advantage, we don't have it, and I don't want it. This is because if you have a four-door and a four-door coupé, you have to do two rooflines, and that becomes a compromise. We wouldn't have the freedom, to make our roof the way it has come out here.



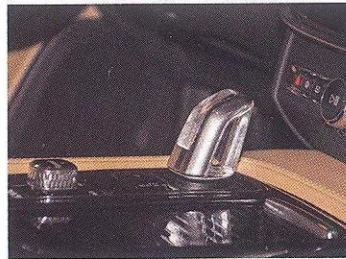
Tasteful blend of high-quality leather, wood and chrome make the cabin look plush and on par with luxury rivals.



XC90-like 'Thor's Hammer' headlights.



Chrome wheels get bold strong design.



Crystal gear lever is part of options.



Large touchscreen borrowed from XC.

three-dimensional and layered look. But the S90's dash does differ from that of the XC in several places. It has a band of chrome that bisects the dash, Volvo has used vertically aligned vents and the doorpads are different too. Indian car buyers will also be happy; there's plenty of legroom in the rear. High support is good, the backrest is large and very supportive and visibility out the rear is improved as the S90 uses a rear quarter glass that makes the insides feel more airy.

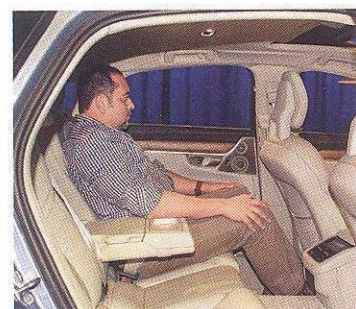
Safety features, also borrowed from the XC90, include the Pilot Assist semi-autonomous driving

feature that keeps the car between motorway road markings and there's also new added features like Volvo's City Safety system that detects large animals and warns the driver or primes the brakes. But it isn't clear as to which of these systems will make it here, as the scrap over the use of automotive radar frequencies is still ongoing.

The new S90 will go up against rivals like the BMW 5-series, Audi A6 and Mercedes E-class when it comes to India in 2016. The 2.0-litre diesel is expected here initially, either in D4 or D5 trim and while

the former is tuned to deliver a healthy 188bhp, it's the more powerful 232bhp D5 we are likely to get first. And Volvo says it will get the top-of-the-line 'Inscription' version here. Pricing, however, will be 'extremely competitive' with other luxury cars in its class, meaning the S90 could go on sale with prices starting at around the Rs 46-lakh mark. And that will make Volvo's new luxury-oriented S90 extremely competitive. What Volvo really has to do now is work hard on improving the reach of its dealer network.

SHAPUR KOTWAL



Rear seat is roomy and comfy too.



Rear air-con is set at a jaunty angle.



Tail-lights are distinctive but oversized.

VOLVO S90 D5	
Price from	Rs 46 lakh (est, ex-showroom, Delhi)
On Sale	2016
L/W/H	4963/2019/1443mm
Wheelbase	2941mm
Fuel tank capacity	60 litres
Kerb weight	2150kg
Engine layout	4 cyls, turbo-diesel
Displacement	1969cc
Power	232bhp at 4000rpm
Torque	48.95kgm at 1750-2250rpm
Specific output	117.83bhp per litre
Power to weight	107.91bhp per tonne
Gearbox	8-speed automatic
Front suspension	Double wishbone, coil springs, stabilizer bar
Rear suspension	Integral axle, transverse composite leaf spring, stabilizer bar
Front brake	Ventilated discs
Rear brake	Ventilated discs
Wheels	8-spoke alloy
Rim size (f-r)	20 inches
Tyre size (f-r)	255/35 R 20 - 255/35 R 20