

The road from Mangalore to the cloud covered hill station of Madikeri is quite well maintained and in the upper reaches of the Western Ghats the road is nice and twisty as well. A perfect place to take a sporty little hatchback then. But I didn't have a sporty little hatchback, I had the surprisingly large Volvo V90 Cross Country.

The V90 Cross Country is the third of the next-generation '90' series of large cars introduced in India by the Swedish carmaker. It follows the XC90 Sports Utility Vehicle and the S90 sedan launched last year. Both those cars are quite large as well, but while the XC90 is a full-size SUV and the S90 a large luxury sedan, the V90 is wait for it, an estate. In this case, in Volvo's 'Cross Country' form a raised estate with more than enough ground clearance at 210 millimetres. But it is an estate after all and estates haven't done very well in India.

The last estate on sale was Audi's RS6 Avant and people didn't care what body shape that car was because it had 550 horses under the hood. Before that you had the Indigo Marina from Tata Motors, the Altura from Maruti, the Octavia Combi from Skoda and the much maligned but rather brilliant Adventure from Fiat. None of these cars did very well and that scared most Indian manufacturers from launching estates. But here is a simple thing, the V90 Cross Country is a rather brilliant idea since it combines the rough road ability of an SUV with the performance of a sedan, well in this case a large sedan because it doesn't have the additional height and weight of an heavy SUV. And you do couple this with an incredible amount of storage space, although you lose the third row of seats, but how often do owners use those? Almost never.

Back to the car, driving the V90 Cross Country which features Volvo's two-litre diesel in a 235 horsepower specification is quite rewarding in the hills. Switch the car to dynamic mode, which makes the steering heavy but also tightens up the



KUSHAN MITRA



# Saying it with an Estate

The newest estate from Volvo's stable, the V90 Cross Country, is a rather brilliant idea since it combines the rough road ability of an SUV with the performance of a sedan



suspension and throttle response which makes it really good fun. But do be warned it could lead to your fellow passengers losing their lunch. Volvo has introduced something called "Power Pulse" on this engine, which keeps a tank of compressed air to spool the turbo up faster so while there is still a little bit of lag, it is almost imperceptible. And the eight-speed gearbox gets the job done fabulously well, and in most circumstances you do not find yourself needing to use the steering mounted gear levers.

But the nicest thing about modern Volvo have been their superb interiors, and while the V90 continues the family look with the 9-inch touchscreen control panel, there are some really nice touches. The machined aluminium interior door handles and

speaker covers add a touch of class which rival cars lack. Similarly, the two-tone leather finish with counter stitching makes the inside of this car a place you really want to be inside. The driver and passenger seats both have a massage function along with ventilation, so your

back is both cool and relaxed. Even after the four hour drive back to Mangalore Airport one actually felt fresh, possibly even refreshed.

But we come back to the same issue, this is an estate and this class of cars despite its undeniable sense has failed on the sales front. Can Volvo change its image? Well, for one this will be cheaper than a XC90 and it is more fun to drive. It is also surprisingly spacious inside with loads of luggage room and rear seat legroom. If you drive over bad roads or even venture into the mud the all-wheel drive keeps it going and the ride is superb. And as mentioned above, the interiors are superb and the Bowers and Wilkins sound system is at another level. Volvo India is also launching this car with one fully loaded trim level. The only option buyers will have is choosing between 19 and 20 inch wheels, the latter being the variant I drove.

So the Volvo V90 Cross Country ticks all the boxes and if you are looking for a car in the '60 lakh range you really couldn't do any better. Now for Indian buyers to give up their reluctance of choosing to buy an estate.