

HIGH-RISE ESTATE

The all-new Volvo V90 Cross Country is headed to India, and we get first crack at it right in its element: Sweden, over a frozen lake, too, no less. Here's what the incoming turbo-diesel Swede wagon is like

Story: Jim Gorde Photography: Volvo, Magesh Madhan, Jagadish Naik & Jim Gorde

ESTATES. THEY'VE BEEN around for decades and they've been evolving from their boxy body style to smoother, curvier, more stylish beings that people actually want to buy. Sadly, in India, they aren't the most popular type of car. For whatever reason, people prefer sedans for their "prestige" factor. However, if you think of an estate as a long hatchback — even the regular size of which is immensely practical — you can see how versatile it could be.

Breaking the Mould

The 'V' is for 'versatility' and the Volvo V90 has that in spades across its five-metre length. At 4,939 mm long,

it's as long as many premium saloons, but with an even more cavernous boot and a just as credible interior and driveline. The V90 Cross Country swaps its leather shoes for gumboots, adding 60 millimetres of ground clearance, and gets a more butch exterior too. There will be just one variant on offer in India loaded with the goodies, including radar-assist support systems, air suspension and a twin-turbo diesel all-wheel driveline.

That's right, the V90 Cross Country D5 AWD is the model heading to India, and in the next quarter of the year, too. The V90 XC is the latest version of the 'V XC' line which began 20 years ago with the V70 XC back in 1997. That had a 2.5-litre in-line five turbo-petrol with 193 PS. The latest to roll off the line now, and the one that's headed here, is the 235-PS 2.0-litre twin-turbo



diesel, I-Art injection, PowerPulse, et al.

We drove the V90 XC D5 AWD on winter tyres with studs, so the handling, although unfathomably brilliant, will not be as relevant to Indian roads, unless you head north with winter tyres to places like Shimla, Kufri or the roads to Leh, that is. With winter tyres mandatory at this time of the year in Sweden, the speed limits of 70 km/h (and 90 km/h on some stretches) were a bit of a shocker to all of us driving because, on ice, the best we dared to

do at first was 40-50 km/h before realising that, while it was slippery to walk on, these tyres — and the car, in fact — held on to the ice much better. Soon we were up to speed limits with ease.

When you have to build something in challenging conditions as a matter of habit, the results can only be incredibly capable. Most other brands head to northern Sweden for cold-weather testing, but Volvos are built there, no less, by the people who live there and drive >

FIRST DRIVE VOLVO V90 CROSS COUNTRY D5 AWD



them every day and Sunday over ice, slush, snow, narrow iced roads and occasional glimpses of tarmac. That makes them well-versed with how the cars handle in all environments, while also being able to fine-tune the suspension setup for optimal driving dynamics. On the road, the studded tyres give more than adequate confidence and it's only an overzealous throttle input that actually manages to kick out the tail on occasion. Even so, the handling was an eye-opener.

Breaking the Habit

The V90 XC D5 AWD has the same powerplant as the S90, with the PowerPulse twin-turbo diesel 2.0 four-pot making all of 235 PS at 4,000 rpm with a very usable 480 Nm of torque available between 1,750 and 2,250 rpm. The eight-speed automatic transmission sends the power through the latest AWD coupling and, using the drive modes, can be set to be rear-biased, too. Yummy!

Weighing about 1,950 kg, the V90 XC D5 AWD behaves like a sub-compact hatch, thanks to its setup. The torque on tap makes it nimble and the PowerPulse — the pressured air canister mounted with the engine to inject air and compensate for turbo-lag — makes it extremely responsive. The added ratios — remember, the older D5s had two less ratios and one more cylinder — feel nicer and harness the power even better than before.

The drive modes include, among Comfort and Eco, AWD and Sport, the latter of which allows for rear-biased power transmission making it eager and quick off the line, too. All of this while enjoying a cabin appointed in fine leather and brushed metal, with a choice of wood trim invariably headed to India.



The V90 XC is a five-seater and has powered everything at the front, with a rear seat you can sink into and enjoy the ample legroom it provides. The car we drove also had heating for seats, which is rather needed when the frozen lake you're driving on has an air temperature that varies between -8 C and -19 C. Speaking of which...

Breaking the Ice

The V90 Cross Country, with its near-two-tonne weight, behaved admirably on ice. After a master lap to get us acquainted, we were asked to switch off the Electronic Stability Control and engage 'Sport'. Right! The first

thing to get used to was minimal steering input and controlling the car using only the accelerator with a dab of the brakes on occasion. After running into the snow banks on the side of the makeshift track crafted out of the frozen lake on the two-foot-thick ice, we eventually began getting a hang of it.

While very few will actually, if ever, drive on ice here, the V90 XC will be a great choice for those looking at a luxury estate they can use every day, with all the tech and comfort one could possibly need. At its expected Rs-60-lakh price-tag, it could very well be priced at half of what the only other estate on sale in India is at the moment — the bonkers Rs-r.35-crore 560-PS Audi RS 6 Avant. Unlike its German 'rival', though, it offers 210 mm of ground clearance. The power tailgate and power-fold rear seats add more value to the equipment list. Not only is the V90 everything practical and versatile, with its huge tablet-like touch-interface, it packs all the necessary connectivity and conveniences and looks, just as the S90, like a vision of the future; Thor's Hammer LED lighting and all.



Surround-view 360° parking camera is an impressive bit of much-needed tech



Nokian Hakkapeliitta 8 SUV 235/50 R19 studded winter tyres were a requirement

VOLVO V90 CROSS COUNTRY D5 AWD

PRICE: Rs 60-65 lakh (estimated)
 ON SALE: Q2 2017
 ENGINE: 1,969 cc, in-line four, twin-turbo diesel, I-ART
 MAX POWER: 235 PS @ 4,000 rpm
 MAX TORQUE: 480 Nm @ 1,750-2,250 rpm
 TRANSMISSION: Eight-speed, automatic, all-wheel drive
 WEIGHT: 1,950 kg (estimated)





ICED EARTH

Volvo Cars celebrate 20 years of their AWD (all-wheel-drive) system and what better way to do that than with a drive on a frozen lake in Åre, close to Östersund, at home in Sweden

Story: Jim Gorde Photography: Volvo, Magesh Madhan, Jagadish Naik & Jim Gorde

ALL-WHEEL DRIVE. POWER going to all the wheels. A lot of people mistake all-wheel drive, popularly denoted as AWD, for 4x4. Yes, they both do the same thing, but in very different ways. You see, a 4x4 car would usually be a large ladder-frame vehicle with huge sockets between the wheels and a pair of levers or a knob that engages the front one, while usually depending on the rear for drive and traction. These are hardcore versions designed to handle the rough stuff: dirt, mud, ruts and

slush, while adding water wading to the tune of one metre to the mix in some cases. But what if you don't want 37-inch tyres, locking differentials and, mostly, a three-tonne body weight? What if there was something different? Something easier?

With evolution, more so in the automobile world than the human one, we have seen less expensive, more complex drivelines arrive for everyday cars. Your people-carrier, sedan or even your hatchback could have all wheels driven. Innovations in engineering and electronics have allowed smart couplings to drive just the front wheels, while engaging the rear axle when the need

arises. Among the few manufacturers who began using this technology for improved traction and all-weather capability in their road cars were Volvo. Being in the icy north necessitates a few things.

Volvo began their research and testing of AWD systems more than 20 years ago. It all started with the venerable 850 Estate: the first production car with their AWD system. It was introduced in 1996 with a turbocharged 2.5-litre in-line five-cylinder engine making 193 PS and it had a good old five-speed manual transmission. Following it was the V70 in 1997. It was also that year that the first 'XC' badge, or Cross Country arrived with the introduction of the V70 XC, a more capable version of the popular station wagon with added ride height and more rugged design elements.

The first-generation XC90, which was introduced in 2002 (and in India later that decade) was Volvo's most award-winning name yet. It was offered with an optional Haldex Traction AWD system with the turbocharged 2.5T petrol engine. The T6 of that model year was a 2.9-litre turbocharged in-line-six powerplant that had this AWD system as standard equipment.

To experience the latest versions of their evolved AWD system, Volvo Cars had four cars on offer, some of which we would drive from and to the airport to Åre and to Åndsjön lake, which was being readied since November to prepare for several Swedish tonnage. With two feet (600 mm) of ice, more or less, to drive on, it was set to be quite an event. There were two tracks: one long outer circuit and one shorter inner circuit. The cars on offer were the V40 Cross Country T5 AWD, the XC90 T8 TwinEngine AWD R-Design and the V90 Cross Country in T6 AWD and India-bound D5 AWD flavours.



Volvo XC90 T8 TwinEngine AWD R-Design

The first car I got my hands on was the sporty avatar of the largest car in their arsenal: the plug-in hybrid XC90 T8. Powered by a conventional turbo-petrol engine driving the front wheels and an electric motor driving the rear ones, it offers intelligent all-wheel drive with a choice of pure electric mode as well. Driving up the countryside blanketed in snow, I made my way up to the mountains. Pristine roads, coated with the slippery stuff, were easily managed by the 2.3-tonne beast in its sporty blue Swede R-Design overcoat. The winter tyres had studs for added confidence, which was all that it really needed.

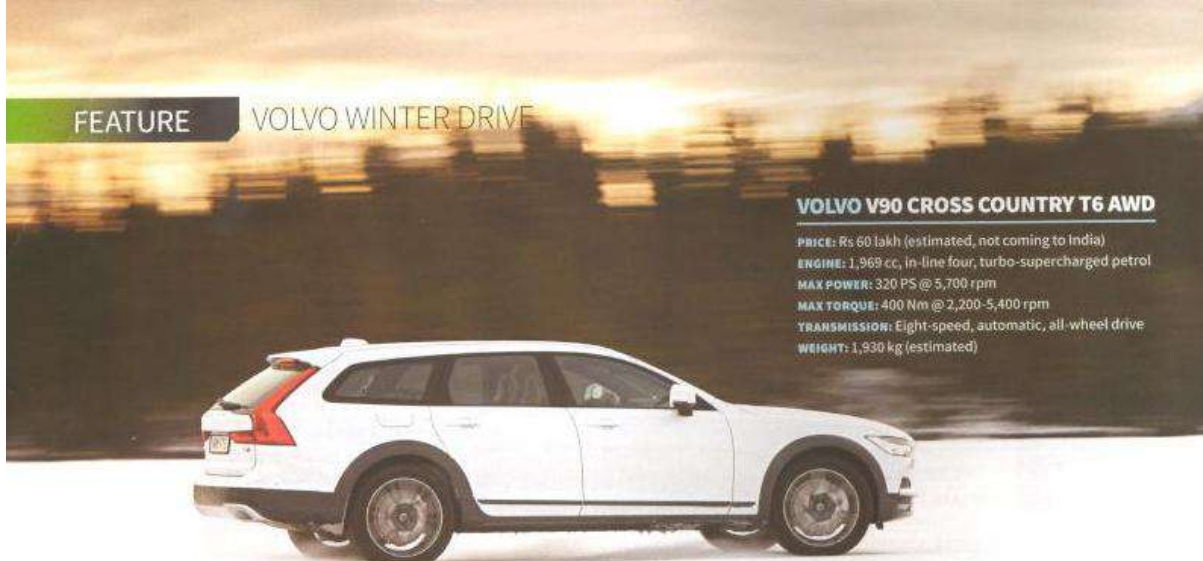
The second go I had was in Åndsjön on the lake. We did try all modes, from Pure — where its electric rear-wheel drive (and a range of 39 km displayed in the info-console) — allowed sliding to take priority: that's the best way to make your way around. While the 'Pure' mode did take a little away from throttle response, it got even more fun in AWD mode with the ESC off. For a huge car, it behaved rather well. Petrol power to the front and electric rear drive. ▶

VOLVO XC90 T8 TWINENGINE AWD R-DESIGN

PRICE: Rs 1.1 crore (estimated)
 ENGINE: 1,969 cc, in-line four, turbo-supercharged petrol
 MAX POWER: 320 PS @ 5,700 rpm
 MAX TORQUE: 460 Nm @ 2,200-5,400 rpm
 TRANSMISSION: Eight-speed, automatic, front-wheel drive
 E-MOTOR: AC synchronous, permanent magnet

MAX POWER: 65 kW (87 PS) @ 7,000 rpm
 MAX TORQUE: 240 Nm @ 0-3,000 rpm
 TRANSMISSION: Automatic, rear-wheel drive
 NET PEAK OUTPUT: 497 PS, 640 Nm
 WEIGHT: 2,310 kg (estimated)
 ON SALE: Late-2017 (expected)





VOLVO V90 CROSS COUNTRY T6 AWD

PRICE: Rs 60 lakh (estimated, not coming to India)
ENGINE: 1,969 cc, in-line four, turbo-supercharged petrol
MAX POWER: 320 PS @ 5,700 rpm
MAX TORQUE: 400 Nm @ 2,200-5,400 rpm
TRANSMISSION: Eight-speed, automatic, all-wheel drive
WEIGHT: 1,930 kg (estimated)

Volvo V90 Cross Country T6 AWD

The V90 is Volvo's latest estate and the Cross Country is its more butch, even more practical version. With an added 60 millimetres of ground clearance, front and rear skid-plates, and side-skirts with 'Cross Country' badging, the V90 XC T6 AWD looked large, yet inviting. We would drive down from the Copperhill Mountain Lodge from the top in Åre to Andsjön and the prepped frozen lake track. The 2.0 turbo-supercharged petrol felt über-responsive and eager to pile on the revs, while giving the burst of power pretty much all across the rev-range. That was something that actually got us sweating even in the -19 C weather, because we were driving on ice and 400 Nm just happens to be a lot of torque even for a near two-tonne family estate.

On the lake, the V90 XC T6 felt like the glorified hatchback it is. With a rather low centre of gravity — at least when compared to the XC90 — it feels more predictable and balanced, inspiring more confidence with each input and response. It's long, yes, but it behaves well.

Volvo V40 Cross Country T5 AWD

The smallest V on sale thus far — also in India, though not in the T5 AWD guise — the V40 Cross Country offers compact practicality with incredible all-road and even some off-road ability. It's the lowest VXC model there is today, with just 153 mm of ground clearance, but that's offset by its shorter 2,647-mm wheelbase. The V40 XC was only available on the lake, with the entire fleet frozen in place.

One push on the starter and the

2.0-litre 245-PS turbo-petrol four whirred to life. The peak 350 Nm is still a good amount of torque for what is essentially a 1.6-tonne premium hatch. Get going and you realise what a hoot it really is to drive. And not just on ice, mind you.

The V40 turns in with ease and, after my warm-up lap (on ice!), I was let loose for four laps with the ESC off. Brilliant!

The initial stretch was a wavy straight which requires minimal steering input. Having driven two other cars, I was trying to put my learnings to good use. So nimble is the V40 XC that my first attempt of a controlled slide ended up in a whump in a snow bank and a shower of microscopic icicles. Once I began getting a hang of the car, though, the smile just kept getting wider. ■

VOLVO V40 CROSS COUNTRY T5 AWD

PRICE: Rs 35 lakh (estimated, not coming to India)
ENGINE: 1,969 cc, in-line four, turbo-petrol, direct injection
MAX POWER: 245 PS @ 5,500 rpm
MAX TORQUE: 350 Nm @ 1,500-4,600 rpm
TRANSMISSION: Eight-speed, automatic, all-wheel drive
WEIGHT: 1,640 kg (estimated)

