



THE PERFECT GETAWAY

WE DRIVE CROSS COUNTRY IN
THE V90 CROSS COUNTRY AND
COME BACK IMPRESSED

By ANUBHAV SHARMA Photographs SOMNATH RAKSHIT

Summer is in full flow and the one place I want to be, apart from a race track, is in the hills. I have never had to take one of those 'are you a beach person or a mountains person' quizzes, it has always been the hills for me. There is something inexplicably peaceful about staring at those snow-covered peaks, reading a nice book with a cup of tea, and not having much else to do. That is pretty much every trip to the hills for me, except the car I drive up in. This time, keeping the destination in mind, it was the very impressive V90 Cross Country.

Mostly when one thinks of station wagons, at least in India, they remember Roshan Seth's ad for the Tata Estate in the mid-90s or a shape they never call beautiful. I think the nice chaps at Volvo must have gotten a similar response from other countries, barring the Roshan Seth ad obviously, and they decided to change that perception. I have to admit, they have done a brilliant job of it. No one can look at the V90 and call it a boring, old station wagon. If they do, I think they need a swing from Mjolnir to bring them back to their senses. Muscular, sharp and extremely good looking; those are the words you should be using when you see the V90 Cross Country. History is witness to the fact that it is not easy to turn a station wagon into something good looking, but Volvo's recent



The surround sound will absorb you in total bliss



Simple and effective, the way it's supposed to be



Central console ensures that rear passengers always have something to fiddle around with if bored

design philosophy has been pretty effective here.

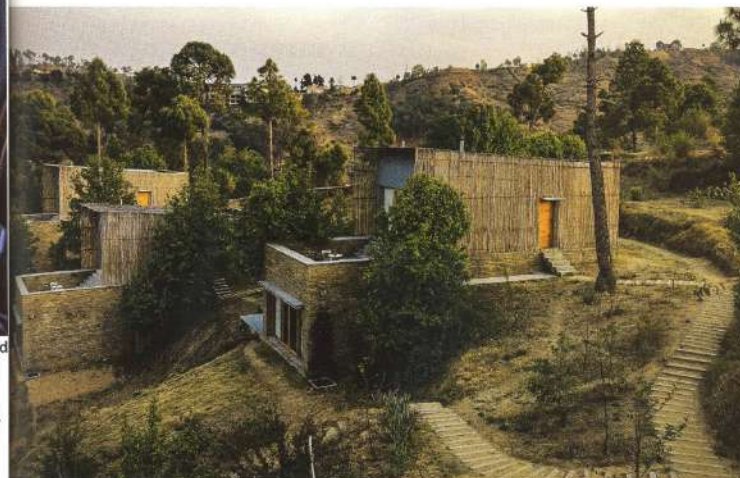
Up to the C-pillar, the familial resemblance is strong, but then who cares when the results are so good looking, right? Post the C-pillar, everything is just the V90. The big studded grille,

adaptive LED headlamps, muscular hood, LED tail lamps and the gorgeous 20-inch 10-spoke alloys are the highlights for the V90 Cross Country. The stance and a 210mm ground clearance are enough to give any SUV or crossovers pretending to be SUV's serious

competition. There's black cladding on the outside as well, to differentiate it from the regular V90, which sadly Volvo doesn't sell in India.

The inside is as luxe and near perfect as we have come to expect in modern Volvos. I won't repeat what most of you know already, but let me tell you what improves the inside of the V90 Cross Country even more - paddle shifters and a panoramic sunroof. There is a new steering wheel, aluminium inserts instead of wood and bigger

Open pore wood and metal grilled speakers were found only on concept cars



The Kumaon is just a lovely place to admire and absorb the natural beauty of the surrounding hills

seats. But it's the panoramic roof that really works wonders in making the bright Scandinavian interior even more welcoming. It is not too long ago that the open pore wood and metal grilled speakers were found only on concept cars, and now Volvo has them on almost every new model.

The Scandinavian interior encourages me to speak a little about our destination - a beautiful property in Binsar, Uttarakhand - The Kumaon. Designed by award-winning Sri Lankan architects, Pradeep Kodikara, a disciple of Geoffrey Bawa, and his partner Jineshi Samaraweera, have beautifully translated the ethos of tropical modernism into a unique mountain design.

The property offers ten luxury suites, all constructed and situated with

sensitivity to their natural environment, allowing guests to feel immersed in nature. Every bed has a view of the peaks, yes every bed not just the room. Every morning you wake up to that glorious sight of sun rays lighting the snow-capped peaks on fire. As long as it is a clear day, obviously. The décor of the suites reminded me so much of the V90's interiors - there is a similar theme of light colors, natural wood and minimalism. With that comparison, I don't need to tell you how fantastic the suites are.

Just like the car, The Kumaon is beautiful not just on the inside. Their library is the perfect place to pick up a book and relax in the mountain sunshine, surrounded by birdsong and the fragrant smell of pine. The restaurant,



A room this serene is a just lovely to get reading



The perfect view to wake up to each morning



Rustic and homely seems to be the overall theme

again stunning to look at or scary if you stand right at the edge, serves delectable food - ranging from local cuisine to continental. The staff are attentive, and despite it being a huge property, are always around to serve you a steaming hot cuppa. For the adventurous, there are village trails nearby which you could embark on to view a variety of flora and fauna. The property manager tells me there is a thriving leopard population around and if I am lucky, I might spot one a couple of metres away. I'm sort of glad at being unlucky on this trip.

Although I did hit a pocket of bad



It's as safe as a tank while simultaneously being just so beautiful

luck on the day we were headed back. On our way down, we stopped at another lovely place – Birdsong café. Run by Kalyani Mirajkar and Alok Meshack, both townies who got bored of the corporate rat race and opened this last year. Birdsong café on Bhimtal bypass road is the perfect stop for people missing a good cup of coffee or authentic Italian food. They even have batman cookies, which I must add were delicious, amongst other yummy desserts. The thought of the food makes me digress, but let me come back to the bad luck part – there were riots through UP and we were advised to stay back for a day or two. After multiple calls

to journalist friends and their friends in the administration, we did decide to hang back for a while. A while turned into a long while and we finally headed back at 11pm, assuming rioters also need a good night's sleep.

The drive back is the reason I haven't yet mentioned how the V90 Cross Country drives. The motor is the same 2.0 diesel which makes 235 hp and 48 kg/m of torque, with Volvo's PowerPulse technology. The PowerPulse system uses a compressor to suck air into a pressurised tank and when the turbos need help spooling, the air shoots into the exhaust manifold to minimise turbo lag. Its two-litre air tank is continuously

topped up and so the turbodiesel never really feels laggy as a result. Something you really appreciate when you are on a winding road and trying to escape (quite literally in this case).

The engine gives you its all without pausing for breath; there is enough torque from as low as 1,500 rpm, and of course, paddle shifters! The cornering LED headlamps light everything in your path, the ride quality is comfortable enough to not unsettle rear passengers and the adequate ground clearance suitably tackles of bad roads. I was back home in Gurgaon in record time. Of course I won't mention the time here, but I just had so much fun driving the

V90 Cross Country, it was as if my life depended on it. In a way it did, but thankfully the rioters were sleeping.

After 4 days of living with the V90 Cross Country, it is hard for me to understand why these cars aren't flying off the shelf. It is comfortable, capable, luxurious, and stands out in a crowd. It even has enough goodies to keep all occupants busy, is also as safe as a tank, while simultaneously being beautiful. It's fun to drive when you push it and easy to drive in traffic – what more do you want in a car, right? I honestly just need the money. I certainly think I've found the perfect car for long weekends to the hills. **M**

AUTODATA

VOLVO V90

POWERTRAIN

Displacement: 1969cc, I-4, turbo-diesel

Max power: 235 bhp

Max torque: 48 kgm

Transmission: 8-speed, auto

TYRES

F/R: 245/45 R20

DIMENSIONS

L/W/H (mm): 4939/1879/1543

Wheelbase: 2941 mm

Ground clearance: 210 mm

Kerb weight: NA

Fuel capacity: 60 litres

PRICE

₹ 60 LAKH (ex-showroom, all-India)

