

drive // VOLVO XC40

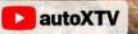
SWEDISH INVASION

In a rapidly growing segment worldwide, can Volvo put a dent in the sales of the German luxury triumvirate with the brand new XC40? We drive one in Hyderabad to find out.

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See the Volvo XC40 in action
on our YouTube channel.





For a carmaker on the path of resurgence, staying away from SUVs is virtually impossible in today's market. Globally, customers have developed an insatiable appetite for SUVs, and the demand simply continues to grow. Volvo has already tasted success in this regard, with its highly popular XC90 and XC60 range of SUVs. In fact, Volvo's brand image in India increased significantly with the current-gen XC90, which has well and truly changed the Indian customers' perception of Volvo for good.

Naturally, then, it would make sense for Volvo to tap into the ever-growing compact luxury segment, which is dominated by the BMW X1, Mercedes-Benz GLA and the Audi Q3 – a formidable set of competitors indeed. But the new XC40 hasn't arrived unarmed, it does have a few interesting tricks up its sleeve to rival the might of its competitors.

Scandinavian touches

First, there's the design. I don't feel any hesitation in admitting that I'm a big fan of Volvo's current design language. Starting with the XC90, the tight and compact lines, with great design detailing, produce a very attractive, and very Volvo-like, design

language that doesn't resemble anything else in the market. The XC40 carries forward this design legacy with some fantastic design quirks of its own. For instance, the C-pillar kink, with its sharp upward creases, make the car stand out and give it an edgy look. I also find the depression in the lower part of the doors quite a nifty design touch, which adds definition to an otherwise straightforward door design. Also, keeping Volvo India's tradition alive, the first set of XC40s to be sold here are to be top-of-the-line R-Design versions, with a contrast roof as standard, which with a red or white body look rather striking. I also love the blacked-out chrome work on the XC40, which is much more to my liking than regular chrome.

Lava flow

Volvo says that their target customers are what we call millennials, and this is reflected in the sharp design – for their research indicates that younger customers are very particular about style. And nowhere is this more apparent than the XC40's interior, which features bright orange trim on the floor and other surfaces, like the door bin and armrest, instead of regular black

carpeting. Volvo refers to this as their Lava trim, and while I'm certainly not a millennial, I do think that the bright treatment brings a certain level of spunk to the cabin. The large glasshouse and the standard fit panoramic roof of the XC40 further add to the overall effect of making the all-black cabin feel quite airy.

The rest of cabin of the XC40 is very similar to its larger siblings, which works in its favour. With the 9-inch Sensus touchscreen display taking centre stage, the XC40 has a rather inviting interior, with plush and comfortable Alcantara seats. The vertical air vents with highlighted chrome work look quite appealing, as do the rather delicately finished speaker grilles of the Harman Kardon stereo system. Interior room in the XC40 seems to be a touch larger than its competitors – the XC 40 is, in fact, longer, wider and taller than its competitors – with a fair amount of headroom. However, I still think it's best to use the XC40 as a four-seater, since fitting five full-sized adults would be a bit of a squeeze. Overall, the XC40's cabin is fantastic, with great quality, detailing and class-leading levels of standard equipment.

Of course, a Volvo can't be a Volvo without



The XC40 is targeted towards millennials, and this is reflected in the vibrant colours in the cabin. The bright orange on the carpets and door pads is known as the Lava trim.



a truckload of safety equipment – and the XC40 is no exception. The XC40 is the first car in its class to offer front radar. Not only that, it also comes with many segment-first safety features, such as Pilot Assist, Adaptive Cruise Control, Lane Keeping Aid and even Oncoming Lane Mitigation. Of course, it also shares City Safety features with other cars in Volvo's line-up, which keep an eye out for pedestrians, cyclists and even large animals. The system applies the brakes if it senses a crash is imminent. Moreover, it also has a bevy of airbags and other active safety aids to allow the car to have what Volvo claims to be class-leading safety standards.

Powerhouse

Based on Volvo's brand-new CMA (Compact Modular Architecture) platform, the XC40, for now, will only be offered with a 2-litre diesel engine paired with an Aisin 8-speed automatic gearbox – with all-wheel drive as standard. Producing 187bhp and 400Nm of torque, the XC40 also leads the pack in terms of power – the BMW X1 has equal power and torque numbers, while the Q3 and GLA lag behind. Given its compact size, the

PROS

- Fantastic design, inside and out
- High levels of standard equipment
- Very refined

CONS

- Diesel only, no petrol or hybrid option for now

X-FACTOR

With striking looks, class-leading equipment levels and fantastic NVH, the XC40 is all set to shake up the segment.





XC40 responds instantly to throttle inputs, while the gearbox shifts reasonably well in automatic mode. It also has the option of manually shifting gears by using the steering-mounted gearshift paddles. For those with an eye for performance, there are also four selectable driving modes to tune the engine and gearbox response to individual preferences. The steel suspension of the XC40 is well tuned and deals effectively with our roads. However, the one aspect of the XC40's driving appeal that impressed me the most is its NVH levels, which are exceptionally good.

The XC40 feels fantastically insulated, not just from the outside world but also engine noise and vibration. This only means that the 13-speaker Harman Kardon audio system is that much more enjoyable to listen to. But, there is a fly in the ointment – the Sensus touchscreen controls. Don't get me wrong, it does work phenomenally well, but, while driving, especially at high speeds, I've never been comfortable operating a touchscreen system – for it requires the driver to take his or her eyes off the road, even if it's just momentarily. And doing that for something as simple as adjusting the cabin temperature is very annoying. Personally, I prefer dedicated air-conditioning controls.



What do I think of the XC40 then? Well, as you might have guessed by now, I'm mighty impressed by it. The design is fantastic with a unique interior that I think will work very well for its target audience. And, of course, there's the powerful engine and a truckload of safety features. What also works well for the XC40 is that all its main competitors are now a bit long in the tooth, which means that it can take extra advantage of being a brand-new product. And then there's also a very high

level of standard equipment, which makes some of its competitors look a bit basic. But, then again, India is still a value-conscious market, and we'll have to wait till early July to find out the price of XC40, which will be a major deciding factor. I'll say this much though, if Volvo India manages to price the XC40 competitively, as it's done with its last few products, I see it being the SUV of choice in its segment. In fact, turn the page to see how it compares with the BMW X1. **OK**

Volvo XC40

Engine: 1969CC / In-line / 4-cylinder / Turbocharged | **Fuel:** Diesel | **Transmission:** 8-Speed Automatic / All-Wheel Drive
Power: 188bhp @ 4,000rpm | **Torque:** 400Nm @ 1,750 - 2,000rpm