



COMPARO

YOUNG MO

The segment-leading BMW X1 has a serious new rival in the Volvo XC40



MEY



As premium brands look at increasing their market share, entry-level luxury compacts have become a very important segment. These cars have the all-important task of luring newcomers to the brand and thanks to their perceived do-it-all capabilities, the compact luxury SUVs have been able to carry out this task far more easily compared to their hatchback or sedan counterparts. In this segment, the second-generation BMW X1 that was launched last year, effortlessly trumped the aging Audi Q3 and the diminutive Mercedes-Benz GLA when we compared the three cars. Its superiority reflects in its leading sales figures too, but now there is a new kid on the block - the Volvo XC40 - that challenges all the merits that helped the X1 win.

Design

Lately, Volvo has become more of an SUV brand than the estates and sedans that it was popular for, and this is clearly a good time to earn that reputation. The XC40 is their third SUV offering, but unlike the SPA based XC60/XC90, it sits on a new low-cost, modular platform called the Compact Modular Architecture (CMA) that it shares with its Chinese parent, Geely. The XC40's design highlights are an upright stance, the dual-tone colour scheme, and a more aggressive design for the Thor's hammer lights that go with its youthful appeal. The XC40 is Volvo's smallest offering but is larger than the Q3 and the GLA and comparable in size to the new X1.

The compact BMW is marginally longer. While the boxier form of the XC40 gives it stronger credentials towards a true-blue SUV styling, the X1's sculpted lines and sleek form make

the it appear more athletic. The M Sport trim seen here only dials up the oomph factor further with its sportier bodywork and a lowered stance that comes courtesy of the M suspension.

The XC40 looks distinctive despite sharing design elements with its larger siblings and it has been a conversation starter everywhere I have gone with it. That said, the X1 in the racy blue seen here, manages to turn heads even today! The design is a personal preference of course, but it gets all the harder with these cars.

Cabin and practicality

The cabins could make the choice easier though, for inside is where the difference is stark! The X1's cabin is typical BMW, with a driver-centric profile for its slim dashboard. What isn't typical, is the gear offered, which isn't a deal breaker. The infotainment is a bit



laggy but supports native BMW apps and Apple CarPlay. If you belong to the other ecosystem though, no Android Auto love for you in here. You also get a head-up display, which reminds you, BMWs are more driver focussed. To that effect, you even get adjustable bolstering on the front seats, but oddly you can't set the lumbar support to your preference. The front seats are quite supportive, none the less. The rear seats can be adjusted for reach and recline too, which is great for long distance journeys. The head, knee and legroom is quite good too and the large windows and panoramic roof make sure you don't feel claustrophobic in here. While it misses out on a powered tailgate, the boot opening is wide and easy to access.

Speaking of the boot, the XC40 doesn't match the X1's volume but offers more versatility with its quirky permutations and combinations for the cargo area. In fact, all storage spaces are wisely designed in the Volvo and the doors can even swallow a laptop! The cabin has a sense of occasion to it with the magma coloured faux wool carpeting and the textured inlays. The quality of materials is on par with the BMW. The infotainment system has a very easy-to-use interface with its vertically oriented touchscreen, but I personally prefer the dash-mounted screen and rotary dial combo in the BMW, because it doesn't need me to take my eyes off the road. That said, the XC40's infotainment is slicker and if you are an audiophile, you simply can't ignore how much better its audio unit is.

You can't ignore the list of features either. You get wireless charging that supports plus size phones, heated seats (though I would prefer cooled), and there



The X1 doesn't get lumbar support for the front seats, but reach and recline adjustment on the rear seats is great for long distance journeys





VOLVO'S AREN'T KNOWN TO BE DRIVER'S CARS, BUT THE XC40 BREAKS THAT STEREOTYPE



The faux wool carpeting and the textured inlays prevent the XC40 from looking like an entry-level offering



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is adjustable lumbar support too. The XC40 feels roomier, thanks to the large glasshouse and has the larger cabin, courtesy of the boxy exterior. It is easily the more pleasant cabin to be in then, but once you get to drive it, you realise that it doesn't really offer you that commanding view of the road that one typically expects in an SUV. The X1 is marginally better in that regard.

Drivetrain, ride, and handling

If you are a driving enthusiast, chances are that your first choice in this segment would be the X1. The sDrive variants are front-wheel-driven and have inherent understeer. The one that promises more fun is the xDrive20d. The 'x' indicates an all-wheel-drive, which is rear biased for a more involving drive and that reflects in how nimble this variant feels over its lesser siblings. Don't expect 3 Series levels of fun, but this is the closest the X1 can get to BMW's fabled driving dynamics.

Feeding 190PS power and 400Nm torque to this drivetrain is the humble 2.0l four-cylinder engine that has a healthy mid-range pull and a linear acceleration

that doesn't overwhelm the driver. Since it is transversely mounted in the X1, it employs the compact Aisin eight-speed gearbox, unlike the ZF transmission that goes with the longitudinally mounted iteration of this engine. The Aisin unit doesn't feel as telepathic when pushing hard, but has smooth and predictable shifts fit for a premium car. The X1 is a fairly easy car to drive in that sense and can be quite enjoyable when you are in the mood. The high refinement of the engine also makes sure that it doesn't feel like an entry-level offering.

Choosing the M Sport xDrive variant also gets you the M suspension which has a relatively stiffer setup. While that contributes largely to the excellent driving dynamics of this car, it can make the ride quite harsh on mediocre roads. So if you find it too jarring for your liking, you will have to agree to a bit of understeer and go with the aforementioned sDrive variant instead. No points for guessing which variant I would choose if I went with the X1. Big if.

That is because the XC40 is exceptionally good to drive! I recently

fell in love with the X3 for how it drives and how significantly better its dynamics are compared to the otherwise perfect XC60. But in this test, I was surprised by how close the XC40 comes to the X1 in terms of driving fun. In fact, it gives the X1 a run for its money and that is a big deal! Volvo's aren't known to be driver's cars, but the XC40 breaks that stereotype. It certainly isn't a benchmark, but it is quite involving for the kind of segment it caters to.

The XC40's engine is humble too but is quite impressive in the city, highway and around the twisties. This one too uses the Aisin eight-speed gearbox, which transmits power through a Haldex all-wheel drive system. The AWD is more safety biased over driving fun, which leads to the XC40 being a wee bit understeery compared to the X1. But the overall balance that the XC40 achieves with the ride quality and chassis balance, gives it more points in my books. All I would want to see improved in this car is the steering feedback - which will make it the perfect package for driving enthusiasts and casual buyers alike.

Verdict

Unlike the last time when we conducted a comparative shoot-out in this segment, the two cars here are so closely matched that it would be hard to make a choice between them. But the verdict becomes simpler as we put the cars through their paces and awarded them points for various attributes. The BMW X1 is excellent as always and leaves little room for complaint. But the XC40 just does most things a little bit better and finally amasses more points than the X1, to become a clear winner of this test.

SCORE CARD	CROWN	
	VOLVO XC40	BMW X1
Styling	8	8
Acceleration	8	8
Driveability (In-gear acceleration)	7	7
Refinement	8	9
Braking	8	8
Ride	9	8
Handling	8	9
Interior space, ambience & features	9	7
Value	9	7
Fuel efficiency	8	8
TOTAL OUT OF 100	82	79

(MAXIMUM 10 POINTS FOR EACH CRITERIA)

ROAD TEST #1752-1753



DRIVETRAIN

	BMW X1	VOLVO XC40
Type	4-cyl turbo-diesel	4-cyl turbo-diesel
Engine capacity	1,995cc	1,969cc
Max power	190PS@4,000rpm	190PS@4,00rpm
Max torque	400Nm@1,750 - 2,500rpm	400Nm@1,750 - 2,500rpm
LxWxH(mm)	4,439 x 1,821 x 1,598	4,425 x 1,863 x 1,652
Wheelbase	2,670mm	2,702mm
Ground Clearance	183mm	211mm
Suspension (F)	Spring strut	Double wishbone
Suspension (R)	Multi-arm axle	Multi-link
Front brakes (F/R)	Discs	Discs
Tyres	225/50-R18	235/55-R18



PERFORMANCE

0-100kmph	8.5s (tested)	8.3s (tested)
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IN GEAR ACCELERATION

30-50kmph in 3rd	2.4s	2.4s
50-70kmph in 4th	3.0s	2.9s
60-80kmph in 5th	2.7s	2.5s

BRAKING

100-0kmph	2.9s / 39.9m	3.1s / 38.3m
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FUEL EFFICIENCY (KMPL)

City	12.8kmpl	11.9kmpl
Highway	18.2kmpl	16.4kmpl
Overall FE	14.2kmpl	13.0kmpl



PRICE (OTR Mumbai)

₹54.36 lakh	₹54.08 lakh
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