

S MURALIDHAR

If we were to list a few attributes that brand Volvo is known to be synonymous with, they would be safety, eco-cred and value in the luxury passenger car space. While its focus on safety has been legendary, the last few years has seen Volvo invest significantly in eco-friendly tech and materials, aimed at reducing its carbon footprint. By the next decade, Volvo intends to go all electric and achieve carbon neutrality.

For its India portfolio, Volvo had brought in the XC90 Recharge plug-in hybrid. Later this year, the Swedish car brand is all set to launch its first full-electric in the Indian market. The XC40 Recharge will fill a gap in the company's portfolio and will also fit nicely into the mid-luxury BEV niche that is unlikely to be filled anytime soon. No sign of Tesla making an appearance here yet, but the XC40 Recharge can more than satiate your quest for an Electric if you have about ₹75 lakh to spare.

Design

The XC40 Recharge will be officially launched for bookings by July this year and the price announcement is also due then. Deliveries are expected to begin by October 2022. Volvo decided to go ahead and give us motoring journals a taste of what the XC40 Recharge will feel like much before the launch. So, I travelled to Delhi last week to drive this Scandinavian staple. Point to note, like the disclaimer at the drive briefing mentioned, the final India-spec XC40 Recharge that will be delivered to Indian customers will be mildly different to the one you see in these pictures. These were imported by Volvo India in the run up to the launch, so that potential customers and the media can experience the



The new fully electric Recharge's exterior design is very similar to the XC40 IC engine version



right-hand variant here. The India bound XC40 Recharge will sport some minor variations to the grille and front fender as part of a facelift. The terracotta red body colour of my test mule (in pics) also won't make it to our shores, but five other paint finishes will be available.

The XC40 IC engine version has been available in India and the new fully electric Recharge's exterior design is very similar. Of course, on closer inspection, you can find design differences, in addition to the small 'Recharge Twin' badge on the bottom right of the tailgate. The bonnet grille is missing and instead the Recharge gets a simple solid panel with the diagonal sash and

Volvo logo plastered across. The final spec XC40 Recharge will also have a sportier front fender. The classic Volvo signature Thor-hammer LED DRLs also sport a mild variation. The side profile of the Recharge almost entirely matches the IC engine XC40, except for the larger 19-inch alloy wheels, which replace the latter's 18-inch rims. The stance of the XC40 and its footprint is the same for both, though the Recharge's length is about 15mm more due largely to the battery pack under floor and the packaging needed for it. The XC40 Recharge features a large 78kW battery pack that stores enough juice to deliver an all-electric driving range of 418km (rated). But this heavy battery adds an additional weight of 400kg to the Recharge compared to the XC40 ICE. The extra weight also makes it sit a little lower and leads to a drop in ground clearance to 175mm.

Cabin

The XC40 Recharge's cabin is also a copy of the ICE version. The classic Volvo layout of the dashboard includes the tablet-sized touchscreen sandwiched between two elongated aircon vents in the centre stack and the signature 3-spoke multi-function steering wheel. Minimalism is the theme for the cabin with simple straight-lined layers and textured metal panels. The leather-clad gear



The leather-clad gear stick with contrast white stitching is the key feature on the centre console PICS: BIJOY GHOSH

stick with contrast white stitching is the key feature on the centre console, in addition to cup-holders, an armrest and a wireless phone charging tray. I observe that the start button has been blanked out because the XC40 Recharge automatically detects the presence of a driver and gets into standby mode. All I had to do was to press the brake pedal and shift into drive.

In the cabin, my test mule also had leather-clad seats, but the final spec for customers will feature leather-free upholstery. It will also sport other sustainably sourced materials. The seats are perfectly constructed, though the squabs of the front two may feel a bit narrow for more generously proportioned occupants. The instrument cluster is also a digital unit with the speedo on one side like

Compared to the IC engine version, this upcoming full-electric is ludicrously fast and addictive. It can even soothe your range-anxiety riddled nerves

the good part is, despite its relatively small footprint, I didn't feel the speed in the XC40 Recharge.

It is still a heavy vehicle, tilting the scales at over 2,100kg. That weight shows up while taking corners at speed, when a bit of understeer can be felt, even though, thanks to the battery pack under the floor, the CG must be lower than in the ICE XC40. Yet, it is easy to flick the XC40 Recharge in and out of traffic. In fact, I may not have attempted many overtakes in the ICE XC40, simply because it would lack the instant torque delivery that is assured in the Recharge. The suspension is just right for the highway, but feels a tad firm on broken tarmac. The steering is precise and has enough heft for a confident drive.

The 78kW battery pack can be charged to 80 per cent via a home socket overnight or a 50kW DC charger in about two and half hours or in about 33 minutes if its plugged into a 150kW charger. The rated driving range is about 418km, though my guess is that in real world driving conditions you should be able to get 320-350 km. The XC40 Recharge coasts for long distances without any regen braking kicking in if one doesn't choose the 'one pedal drive' mode. When I choose the one pedal mode from the onscreen menu, the regenerative braking is pretty heavy and the moniker for the mode becomes rather clear.

There is no option for multiple, variable regen braking modes to choose from. The one pedal mode is very useful and practical in city traffic conditions and can recover quite a lot of battery charge. The mode can take a bit of getting used to, but can effectively replace the use of the brake pedal. The XC40 Recharge also gets a full set of safety features, including a range of ADAS (advanced driver assistance systems) functions.

Bottom line

What the XC40 Recharge does best is deliver that key fun-to-drive experience that makes electric an attractive option for buyers who are owner-drivers. The only bit working against the XC40 Recharge could be the fact that it resembles the ICE version so much. EV buyers typically expect exclusivity, especially if the car is from a traditional ICE maker. Maybe Volvo should consider exclusive body colours that set it apart. But, at an estimated on-road price of about ₹75 lakh, the XC40 Recharge will be one of the only and yet ideal choices for buyers.

spare wheel, if it is strapped up and carried onboard in the boot. But, the good bit is that the trunk at front (or Frunk as Volvo calls it) inside the bonnet offers about 31-litres of storage, though one has to get past the mind block to store things in the 'Frunk'.

Performance

The XC40 Recharge features full-time all-wheel drive using two electric motors, mounted one each on the front and rear axle. Each of these motors generates 204hp of power and peak torque of about 330Nm. That's a massive combined total of about 408hp and 660Nm. All that torque is available from the word go and contribute to the impressive 4.9-second acceleration to 100kmph from standstill. On the road, the XC40 Recharge behaves like a slingshot, pinning me back into the seat when I stamp my right foot on the throttle.

On paper, its performance numbers match or even outdo some of the other luxury EVs. But all of those are bigger in size and that makes the straight line sprint of the XC40 Recharge unique. It simply takes you by surprise even if you are expecting it. In closed sections of road, off the highway from Delhi to Jaipur, the XC40 Recharge hits 150kmph even before my eyebrows land back in place after they've 'exclaimed'. And