

First Drive | Volvo XC40

SMALL IS THE NEW BIG

Volvo's latest offering, the XC40 compact luxury SUV, has got the attention of the world. We drive it in Barcelona and find out why.

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'Nothing can bring you peace but yourself'

It's a sunny but cold afternoon in Barcelona as we head to the VIP parking in El Prat Airport to drive the new Volvo XC40, the Swedish model's latest compact luxury offering. It sits between the XC40 and XC60, has the flagrant star and iron mask on the grille, and the company offers it as sort of a "crossover" to the XC40 and XC60. Why? It's a more pliant -- Compact Modular Architecture or CMA (see box or page 54) -- that has been designed with new parents Geely and will be used by other brands under their wing.

We pull into the reserved lane and there is a line of sparkling new XC40s all lined up waiting for us to drive them out around coastal Spain. The selection of drivelines: the D4 AWD Momentum (front and T5 AWD R-Design) prevail. The Amazon Blue XC40 has a contrasting white roof and white walls.

Not quite white after-wash, though. Stripped of its 18-inch Continental Premium Contact 1 rubber, the T5 R-Design looks small and somewhat shabby. Two quick spins with the XC40 T5 R-Design FWD in HUGO color over the Vía Laietana in Eixample, the barrio where Gaudí built his Sagrada Família, make clear that this is a car for the urban.

Top left: XC40 interior
Top right: XC40 interior
Bottom: XC40 exterior

Bottom right: XC40 interior
Bottom center: XC40 interior

'A place for everything, everything in its place'

Thought. More than anything else, that's what's gone from the XC40's interior. Yes, the layout is very familiar if you've been in a new Volvo. The same rear hatch on the center console, the long light bar across the dashboard, the driver side display, the mounting armrest, the buttons for the adaptive cruise control, and other bits are all familiar. You'd know both from the point of view of the dashboard but not so much from the interior.

They've relocated the dash speakers to the top so that the pockets can hold more of whatever you want to put in them -- books, newspapers, notebooks, name tags, phones -- and there are more cargo spaces available: cup-holding space for the key, a wireless charging pad for your phone, slots for bookends,

under-armrest storage, and even a tray for the feet. Just ahead of the armrest is some sort of tray that is used to dredge hair and umbrella canes plus into the glove box. Oh, simply remove it to make space for another rag. Below it hangs the banner in three conceivable -- black, beige, red, and combinations thereof -- are available -- and one not for the male.

The cabin is quite large and spacious. The front seats are brilliant. The premium material makes the cabin feel even larger and roomier. The A-pillars are not that thick, so visibility is good (but there are big C-pillars). At the rear, the seats are great, but lack the depth required for better off. There is, however, not too much room for two adults here. The rear seats can't even be moved a bit back. Of course, there's behind a load of death in either the weight of the center load-area -- the only XC40s like, possibly, holding a pouch of White-well 5. As always, it's got a longer base, 400 liters with the second row up and 1,340 liters with it down. Enough for most weekend getaways and more. The power tail-gate and load-expansion help, too.

Cooler? It's got the familiar Volvo look-like-to-suit feel and the quality of leather upholstery and interior bits -- trim, plastics, and other materials — don't feel any less special than what you would find in an XC60. Did I mention it's built in Ghent in Belgium? Come when else their winter starts?

"Waste not, want not."

A company committed for the active family doesn't mind a T5. Driving room to move easily having said that, and the fact that the environment is so quiet, the new range of Drive-E engines make sense. They're still 2.0-liter-longs, with 1.5-liter engines set to arrive later on. Preced and diesel share the same basic motor and, hence, displacement — 1.5 liters. With an 8.8:1 compression ratio, the T5 petrol puts out 147 kW and 300 Nm. The diesel, with its higher

