

Driven

VOLVO XC40 // MERCEDES-AMG C 43 //
HYUNDAI CRETA

VOLVO XC40

Test location: Hyderabad

Photography: Gaurav S Thombre

Volvo XC40

The first ever compact SUV from the Swedish manufacturer is like a breath of fresh air in its segment

HOW DOES ONE STAND APART in a crowd? Especially when the crowd comprises scaled-down models of larger, meaner and luxurious SUVs. If you are Volvo, then it is quite simple actually – you just break convention and pull out a winner – the new XC40. The Swedes have recognised that as demand for practicality grows, the focus transitions from sedans to SUVs. The proof is in the pudding. They have received critical acclaim for their new products with the XC60 walking away with the World Car of the Year. And it doesn't end there. The XC40 has already ticked off the European Car of the Year. We drove the baby XC a couple of months ago in Spain but now we have finally got our hands on it in India and it comes in an even more youthful avatar.

All in or nothing

It has become a tradition of sorts for Volvo to offer their top-of-the-line variant to the Indian buyer, introducing less-equipped trims later on. This top-down approach has worked well for them, the same strategy being played for

the XC40 as we get the 'R-Design' first. What Volvo has done with the styling is not mark the XC40 look like a compressed XC60 or XC90, something which the Germans could learn a thing or two about. The tall stance is matched with sporty bits that work in the favour of the XC40. Black accents around the grille, window sills, and both the bumpers make the car look striking and work well with the black roof and spoiler. The LED headlights, called 'Thor's hammer' headlights (Mjolnir for you comic-book nerds) conform with the styling. That is one of the sexiest bits of the exterior.

Fresh interiors

Step inside the cabin and the XC40 continues to prove why it is one of the premium products in the market. Things like dark Alcantara and leather-clad seats with double white piping, the chunky steering wheel, wireless mobile charging pad, faux metal dash panel, panoramic sunroof and the rear USB Type-C charging port, which is also somewhat limiting, are some of the unique bits that make it all the more appealing.

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But, hands-down, the faux wool Lava Orange interior cladding material, made from recycled products, is one of the hottest items I have seen in a car. Sure, it may seem ostentatious to those who are accustomed to the German way of luxury but to Volvo it is quite essential that they offered something that is simply loud and screams youthfulness without being crass. And that is exactly who Volvo want to tap with the XC40. They want the young buyer to drive something that looks good all round. You can get an all-black interior but why should you? It gets the 9-inch touchscreen infotainment system that is as simple and effective to operate as your iPad. You can control nearly all aspects of the car from the touchscreen, that supports Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

New CMA platform

Unlike the SPA (Scalable Product Architecture) platform that the bigger XCs are built on, the Volvo XC40 is based on the new Compact Modular Architecture (CMA) platform. It is smaller, lighter and will be used for future Volvo cars that will be electrified in some manner, post 2019. This also means that the Volvo XC40 will arrive in India via the CBU route and



not CKD as the others XCs. This, the XC40 will be brought down from their manufacturing facility in Belgium and not from Sweden.

Diesels for India

The future maybe petrol or electric for Volvo, but for now we make do with a 2-litre in-line four-cylinder diesel motor which is mated to an Aisin 8-speed auto 'box with the Haldex transfer case for on-demand AWD. It makes 187.4bhp and 400Nm of torque, which is par for the course. The auto box also has a manual operation by means of steering wheel

mounted paddleshifters that have got a nice Alcantara-clad back section. There are four preset driving modes – Eco, Comfort, Off Road and Dynamic – with an 'Individual' mode option to customise the steering weight, engine maps and interestingly braking force that one needs to apply to bring the car to a halt. You can change the modes on the go except for Off Road mode where you need to bring the car to a dead halt.

Although we set off in the Eco mode to head out to the test location, it was apparent that this would only be called upon if there





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ever were a fuel crunch as it kills all engine response. It certainly gets better in Comfort mode as we made our way through the city of Hyderabad. The chunky steering wheel has a light feel to it as you navigate through town but there is little to no feedback from the electrically-assisted power steering. It has got a ridiculously high ground clearance of 211mm, nearly 30mm more than its closest German rival and on par with the Range Rover Evoque. This comes in handy when going over our famously tall speed-bumps with little fear of hearing the clang sound of scraping the floor.

Although the XC40's steel tub is stiff and taut, the suspension setup is soft. Unlike most SUVs with a soft and wallowy suspension setup, the Volvo sports very good rebound damping. As a result, the secondary bounce is well controlled, even when the speeds rise. The fact that the XC40 gets 18-inch alloys with super sticky Pirelli PZero rubber certainly helps in the ride quality department. For those who want a firmer ride or a slightly more enhanced styling, there is the option of upgrading to 20-inch wheels.

On the highway

Our test route was primarily the wide and scarcely trafficked ORR highway of Hyderabad, which offered little opportunity to discover anything about cornering. That being said, it was a perfect opportunity to test out the Dynamic driving mode. The steering feels heavier and although there is still that lack of feedback, it is quite precise. In its base mode, the Haldex transfer case pushes the bulk of the drive to the front, allowing only five per cent of the power to be transferred to the rear. The engine feels livelier than in the other modes and pushes it to illegal speeds quickly with no hints of turbo lag. The laziness of the transmission however is apparent as the Aisin auto takes slightly longer than expected. It does get better however when you slot it in manual and operate those flappy pedals.

The XC40's transmission does have a quirk though. The gear stub, small and class, takes two movements to slot the car either into Drive or Reverse from one of these two positions or even from Parking. Something that owners will have to get used to. Even the



Facing page, top: Clean dash layout and top class materials lend a youthful air to the XC40's cabin.
Above: Attention to detail on stitched leather on gear knob is top class

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auto-releasing of the electronic parking brake takes dabbling of the accelerator pedal twice as the dash flashes a warning that it is going to move before it actually does.

Safety aids like the lane changing alert as well as pilot assist work well when the road markings are well defined. That meant once we turned off the ORR, the system hardly came in handy as it could no longer sense the road ahead. The adaptive cruise control can be set to 200kmph with pilot assist working until 130kmph, but that too isn't particularly useful away from expressways and the odd highway in our country.

Keen to test out the claimed off-road capabilities, we stumbled upon a nice piece of land to do a bit of dirty business. With the car in Off Road mode, it starts to show why she is better equipped at taking on minor obstacles when not on tarmac. You can switch the ESP off to kick up some dirt, which it does effortlessly. There are aids such as Hill Start



Above: Standard XC40 rides on 18-inchers. 20-inch wheels are optional. **Below:** The four-cylinder diesel engine is punchy enough for illegal speeds

Assist and Hill Descent Control, that will come in handy but we unfortunately could not get to test it. However, if you are asking it to take on the more serious stuff, it will run out of steam.

Clincher

With its launch slated for early July, Volvo has got another winner on its hands. With premium spec components, high tech gizmos and good dual nature personality, it does seem to offer a better overall package than its German competition on paper. At least that's what first impressions suggest. If Volvo prices it close to the ₹35-40 lakh mark, they will certainly find good demand for the XC40. Good thing then that their dealership ramp up continues apace with six new dealerships set to open until the end of the year, one every month. And the XC40 will keep them all very busy indeed. ☒

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Specification

Engine	Transmission	Maximum power	Maximum torque	Top speed	0-100kmph	Price
1969cc, 4-cyl, in-line, twin-turbo diesel	8-speed auto	188bhp @ 4700rpm	400Nm	210kmph (claimed)	7.9 sec (claimed)	₹38 lakh (estimated)

➤ Stylish, feature rich, top class safety ❌ Prone to understeer

evo rating ★★★★★