

Size does not matter!

Volvo's new XC40 will attempt to bust a few myths and break up the competition in the compact luxury SUV segment



S MURALIDHAR

Volvo has steadily built up its vehicle portfolio, replacing its older generation models with new ones that have been constructed on more modern, modular platforms that will also future-proof these cars for the coming age of electrics and plug-in hybrids. Volvo's strategy seems to hinge on making as little noise as possible and to quietly usurp market share by developing vehicles that offer more features and value compared to the competition. Recently its high performance cars brand 'Polestar' has also been hived off as a separate company, so we can expect more crackers on wheels in the future sporting that tag.

Late last year, Volvo launched its smallest sports utility vehicle yet — the XC40, which at about 4.4 metres, is in the same size class as the BMW X1, the Audi Q3 and the Mercedes-Benz GLA.

With what is now become its trademark marketing warfare strategy, the XC40 is being offered with more equipment and safety features than the competition and it also has the brand's famous Swedish design flair going for it. The XC40 will be a key addition to the India portfolio when it is launched in July this year. Luxury SUVs rule the market here and even in Volvo's case, about a third of its sales comes from the larger sibling XC60. So, how does the XC40 fare compared to the competition? Does it have what it takes to grab the crown in the small luxury SUV segment? To find out, I travelled to Hyderabad last week to

join the test drive of Volvo's newest SUV family member.

Design

It was a smart call by Volvo to adopt the top-down approach for its model strategy. After the XC90 and XC60, the new, smaller model completes its SUV portfolio, says the company. The XC40 is built on the new 'Compact Modular Architecture' (CMA) platform created by Volvo and Geely.

This is a versatile platform capable of spawning different vehicle types of varying sizes in the B and C segments. Unlike many of the competing models which are crossovers, the XC40 has the same upright, tall SUV stance that its bigger siblings also sport.

The XC40 sports the Thor-hammer LED signature in the headlamps with some minor modifications, and the same bonnet grille design with the vertical slats and the Volvo logo with the sash cutting across. The grille is finished in black and the other features are also proportionately smaller.

The bonnet itself has a clamshell design, but the slab tapers down at the front creating a curious, but still very appealing nose. The XC40 is obviously taller than most of the competitors, with a ground clearance of 211 mm. Also impressive is its 21.7-degree approach angle and the 30.4-degree departure angle — both these dimensions deliver that message that this has the capability to go off-road; even before you know that the XC40 comes standard with a fourth-generation Haldex All-wheel Drive (AWD) sys-



Nine-inch infotainment system

tem for those jaunts.

The black side cladding running around the vehicle and cutting the rear fender in half makes the XC40 seem even taller. Its SUV character comes through most when viewed from the side, with the contrast glossy black roof running parallel to the shoulder line.

The black treatment extends to the roof rails, rear spoiler, A and B pillars and halfway down the C-pillar too. The 18-inch rims in my test mule didn't look too weak, but it was exciting to know that customers can even opt for 20-inch alloys.

The rear is one of the most uncomplicated and elegant designs, with a tasteful version of the vertical tail-lamp design that Volvos are famous for. The powered tailgate cuts deep into the rear fender

and also offers a low loading lip when it is being opened.

Cabin

The first impression of the cabin is that it is not as opulent as the XC90's, or as luxurious as the XC60's, but it does still very much exude an air of premium-ness. In keeping with the buyer profile being younger, with expectations of a sportier trim, the XC40's cabin features more brushed metal trim elements, including aluminium pedal inserts. The seats feature the familiar design that we have already seen in other Volvos, though compared to the bigger SUVs, the XC40's seats feature slightly smaller squabs and a mix of real leather and Alcantara. Similarly, the crystal knob for the engine start/stop from the bigger cars is missing in the XC40 — you just get a simple start button and one more to choose between Eco, Comfort, Off-road, Dynamic and individual drive modes. The high-end Bowers & Wilkins audio system from the XC60 is missing in the XC40, but the 13-speaker Harman Kardon system is certainly not lacking in fidelity.

But what has been carried forward is the nine-inch touchscreen on the centre stack. Looking almost like a full-size tablet on the dashboard, this screen is the control centre for multiple functions including infotainment and navigation. The instrument cluster also has a small screen in the middle of the two digital dials, mirroring the Nav and other functions. The seats are comfortable, even at the rear with the kind of legroom you can expect from a vehicle in this size class. The boot offers 460 litres of storage space, but the innovative other storage options in-



Sink into comfort The cabin exudes an air of premium-ness S MURALIDHAR

cluding hooks and foldable trays really make the XC40's cabin extremely practical. The cabin also offers excellent visibility and feels very airy, thanks also to the panoramic sunroof.

Performance

Globally, the XC40 is being offered with three-cylinder and four-cylinder hybrid powertrains including dual clutch transmissions. For the India-spec, Volvo is planning to offer the SUV only with a two-litre, four-cylinder, diesel (D4) engine paired with an eight-speed geartronic auto transmission. Initially, the XC40 will also be offered only in one 'R Design' trim variant. The D4 engine generates a peak power of 190 hp and a peak torque of 400 Nm. With an excellent NVH package, engine noise is hardly heard inside the cabin even under steady throttle. The refined engine also doesn't feel strained at any point while powering this 1.7-tonne SUV (kerb weight). During my test drive on the highways and rural roads on the outskirts of Hyderabad, the engine also delivered an acceptable mileage of 9-10 kmpl.

There is loads of low-end torque available from just under 2,000 rpm; so acceleration from standstill feels quick. Compared to Eco and Comfort, the XC40 feels quicker in

Dynamic mode, with gear shifts being delayed all the way to the redline. Manual gear selection is also possible using steering-mounted paddles. The Haldex AWD system keeps the torque split at a 95:5 bias for mostly front-wheel drive conditions on regular Tarmac, and can offer up to a 55:45 split for off-road conditions.

Bottomline

The XC40 is being offered with a lot of safety equipment as standard. Many of these, like front radar-based safety systems such as lane-keeping assist and city safety with pedestrian and large animal detection, are not offered by many competitors. There is also parkpilot assist and other off-road assists like hill descent and hill start control.

The ride quality is just right, to help keep the XC40 unruffled even on bad roads. The vehicle also feels very planted and confident even at high three-digit speeds. Overall, the XC40 is a quintessential Volvo that delivers on multiple fronts and is a sumptuous package for buyers looking for great value in the ₹40 lakh to ₹45 lakh price range. Competing models like the Audi Q3 and the BMW X1 will certainly feel the heat, as would some of the other options in the slightly less expensive price segment.



The XC40 has impressive ground clearance