



Swede Child O' Mine!

K. Sunil Thomas comes away impressed by the upcoming XC40, Volvo's compact SUV





Think Volvo and two things come to mind. One, Swedish finesse. Second, big, chunky cars or buses that eat up the highways.

Well, okay, maybe soccer moms, too!

In a few months from now, that stereotype could go in for a cool makeover, courtesy the much-anticipated launch of Volvo's compact SUV, the XC40. This 'child' in the Swedish auto giant's line-up also completes its SUV line-up, Volvo now has an SUV for

every series of cars it makes, and altogether ten luxury models.

The XC40 may be small for you, but it is pretty big as far as Volvo's ambitions are concerned. It is pivotal to the company's 'major push' strategy in the Indian luxury car market. Over the past few years, it has seen its international rivals like BMW and Audi taking on traditional luxury car market leader Mercedes-Benz in the local market and making major inroads. Sure, Volvo

has great models, from the sporty S60, the luxury hatchback V40 and even the much-awarded luxury seven-seater SUV XC90, yet the glory it yearns for eludes it. And to make matters worse, the name 'Volvo' often conjures up in the mind of many Indians long-distance buses rather than cars (worse because the bus maker is a completely different company from Volvo Cars, even though they share the same logo).

Hence the XC40, on its sleek, tender



well with the minimal, sleek design. The Swedish flag rubber tab inserted on the corner of the bonnet is a cool feature. What does it do? Nothing. But does it add to the allure? Oh, yes!

In fact, it's the nifty little things that Volvo has thoughtfully added to this vehicle that makes it a winner. Style and artistic designs have been lavished on the interiors so much to make it appeal to demographics hitherto not normally perceived as an SUV's, or for that matter a luxury SUV's target audience - like the curved door handles, crystal gear lever, square-shaped central dash area, etc.

It's not all style and no substance, either. The Harman sound system is awesome, but the speakers are not placed in the doors - they make way for a storage space ideal for anything from magazines to your laptop. There are trays under both the front seats, a few fold-out hooks (mighty useful when you go shopping or go home with take-away), a space for your phone with charger, and a removable water-proof bin for trash (Swachh Bharat and all. Just saying).

And besides all the modern features we expect as standard these days - navigation, connectivity, parking assistance, cross traffic alert, 360 degree camera etc., Volvo's cool new innovation being tried for the first time

with the XC40 is its digital key technology - an app downloaded on phone can plan time slots in which the car can be given to your family member or friend. On activation, the car locks click open at the fixed time as the designated driver approaches!

For the driving nitty-gritty, yes, this is a cool car, and a cool drive. Equally suited for city commute as well as a weekend trip with the entire jing-bang. The high ground clearance should make this particularly attractive to us Indians. While switching to 'Dynamic' mode does give the engines some extra thrust useful while going uphill or zipping down an expressway, perhaps it is better not to get too adventurous with this one off-road, say experts.

Volvo has also launched its revolutionary 'Care by Volvo' scheme in select countries with the XC40, whereby on a flat subscription fee, you get to use the car, all maintenance, insurance, get replacements for wear-and-tear as well as 24/7 customer service. Sounds too good to be true? Maybe it is, as there is no clear sign whether this service will be offered in India, when Volvo's little child with big hopes hingeing on him gets launched in the country soon.

Price & model specs for India yet to be announced. Expected launch in India should be in July or August.