

Quick clarification at the start, I did not drive the new XC40 during its India press drive, ongoing in Hyderabad right now but did get a chance to drive the upcoming new Volvo during its international media drive in Barcelona last December. But first things first, what is the XC40? This is the Swedish car-maker's first new car on its new small car platform developed jointly with their Chinese owners, Geely. Despite being smaller, Volvo has managed to keep a lot of the design language from their bigger sports-utility vehicles the XC60 and XC90 on the XC40, and this is clearly a very good-looking SUV. The way Volvo has managed to combine the two-tone colour scheme on the top-end 'R-Sport' edition with a very cool half and half on the rear C-pillar, makes this car's side-profile particularly appealing.

India will get a single engine option, the two-litre turbocharged diesel variant, the D4. This is the top-end diesel, coupled to a eight-speed automatic box and this will be coupled with all the bells and whistles available on the 'R-Sport' package that include, among other things, the touchscreen infotainment controller with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, wireless charging, radar-enabled active safety features and a thirteen-speaker Harmon-Kardon system. In terms of equipment, you cannot really fault this car. And nor can you when you look at the specs sheet, in terms of size it actually is wider than all the competition and more or less the same in terms of length and height.

So, the competition then.



KUSHAN MITRA



Cat among the pigeons

The Volvo XC40 if priced well can upset the Mercedes, BMW and Audi applecart in the small, luxury SUV segment



The columnist takes his hands off the wheel on the XC40 and lets the car steer itself on the highway outside Barcelona

This is a highly competitive segment with the relatively new BMW X1 as well as the Mercedes-Benz GLA and the dated but still competitive Audi Q3. The thing is that despite making some very nice cars of late, and I have really enjoyed driving all the new Volvo's such as the second-generation XC90 and XC60 as well as the brilliant V90 Cross Country. But despite being brilliant cars,

Volvo still has to make inroads into the minds of luxury car buyers. Most Volvo owners in India, and I know a few, love their cars and actively want to replace one with another and promote the brand with their friends. And

although there was the earlier V40, it was a hatchback and the 'luxury hatchback' market was a dead-end in India even for Mercedes-Benz and BMW. Volvo India did not have a product that gave an entry into the brand.

Now, with the XC40 they have, if of course pricing stays in the sensible range. Volvo India tend to load all their

cars up with a ton of features that add to the cost, their massage seats on their XC60 and XC90 while lovely while driving ignore the fact that most Indians who buy such cars rarely drive themselves. Their audio systems, while spectacularly good might be a bit of overkill for a typical luxury car buyer in India. As such, every Volvo is designed for an owner-driver and their cars until now were too expensive and too big to appeal to that category of buyer.

That is less the case with this segment of buyer. But as I argued last week, this segment is one that very often chooses a brand over sensibility, if you were practical you would buy something like a Hyundai Tucson and the Volkswagen Tiguan makes more sense if you want a smart-looking German SUV. Take the Audi Q3 for example compared against the XC40, the current generation car will be replaced next year, the vehicle is dated, lacks features that are standard on the Volvo. Yet, the Audi Q3 still pulls buyers based on the power of the *Chaar Choori*.

That should not be the case, because the XC40 is a fun car to drive as well. I drove both the D4 and T5 models in Barcelona. The D4 comes with 190PS of power which is quite a bit for a car of its size, and thanks to

Volvo's 'Power Pulse' technology that uses compressed air to get the turbos rotating quicker, there is little power lag. But the

variant I enjoyed more was the stunning T5 petrol which had a two-litre turbocharged engine with over 250PS of power and was a hoot to drive on the highways outside the Spanish city. Just to note, Volvo also has a D3 and a T3 variant, the numbers Volvo uses are similar to Audi and denote power output, that have 150PS and 160PS of power respectively. Fact is, that the XC40 in its D4 avatar only has the BMW X1 match it in power output and features, and the X1 is its strongest rival (including the fact that it has a stronger brand).

Also, Volvo has brought along their excellent radar-assisted active safety features along to India. Last year, I tried using this in Spain and allowed the car to follow the car in front with radar-assisted cruise control, that helps maintain a safe distance to the car in front and also lane-assist which keeps the car between the dashed lines. Of course, these are great features for the west but like in the other Volvo's and the Mercedes-Benz S-Class which have these features they might be a bit much for our chaotic and poorly marked roads, although they are useful on some of the new highways around the country - like Hyderabad's Outer Ring Road.

I genuinely liked the XC40, and I hope Volvo, despite loading the car up with features, prices the car well when they launch it later in July. It gives the German cars a run for their money in terms of features, it is genuinely fun to drive and marks out your individuality, Volvo India should offer the petrol engined models as well as explore offering some lower-specified models as well.

