

# DRIVE

## ESTATE-OF- THE-ART

Has Volvo lengthened its winning streak of making great estate cars? The V90 Cross Country is all the proof you need



**C**onfession: I've got a thing for estates. Not the tract of land one inherits upon the passing of a benefactor; I'm talking about station wagons. It all comes down to functionality – which is dialled up considerably in an estate, since it can do whatever a sedan does, and carry your dogs in the third row. So, it is rather lamentable that the Indian market has never taken to them, sticking to an acquired preference and conventional symmetry of sedans.

Volvo seems to have an instinct for making great estates, right from the days of the iconic Duett to the sensational 850 T5-R – the world's first factory-entered racing estate. So, I was understandably chuffed when its latest one, the V90, was making its way to India, the first legit Volvo estate to be sold here. Except it's not a V90 – it's the V90 Cross Country. And we're all the better for it. Because, unlike most cars that are given the faux-SUV treatment, the V90 can leave plenty of off-roaders biting its dust.

But first let's go through the basics. The V90 is essentially the estate version of Volvo's popular S90 sedan. In its "Cross Country" guise, it gets an all-wheel drive system, plenty of cladding around the bottom edges and a raised ride height to make it more off-road friendly. Far from being superficial, Volvo's "Cross Country" tech has cut its teeth on Scandinavian winters, which is a kind of simulation programme for hell, except much harsher as far as the driving bit is concerned. For the Indian spec, Volvo has jacked the car up to an SUV-ish 210mm, and after having driven it in Mumbai for a week I can testify to the fact that the V90 CC can pretty much go anywhere. Every time the patchwork, cobbled streets of urban Mumbai throw you a curveball, the V90 just shrugs it off and linearly goes about its business.

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In terms of style, the car is a major departure from Volvo's boxy estates of the past (not that there was anything wrong with those) and has been given a taut, swashbuckling profile – similar to the S90 up front, but with a sleek, sloping tailgate, making it handsomely proportionate. Its appearance commands considerable attention on the roads, but unlike a lot of top-brass SUVs, it radiates gentility instead of imperiousness – a trait that's characteristic of any Volvo.

Volvo's also engineered for comfort instead of outright performance. And so, the V90 CC's engine specs are equally modest. A 2.0-litre, "D5" diesel engine (the same one from the XC90 and the S5) is what it gets, having been spared a petrol motor. With total power levels adding up to 234bhp, the V90's got the sort of grunt you've come to expect from a premium European car. It's just not deployed with the same urgency even though Volvo has taken measures to reduce turbo-lag, but there's always a brief pause before the turbos kick in. When they do, however, the V90 CC gains momentum very quickly, devouring some of its bulk in the process. The engine noise creeps into the cabin at times, and although it isn't of the unbearable variety, it's fairly prevalent. It also gets the same 8-speed gearbox as its compatriots, which is refined enough mid-stride, but isn't very quick on downshifts and upshifts early in the powerband. With everything in sync, which happens after a second's delay, at worst, the V90 is a formidable car, showing a willingness and ability to drive on as the crow flies, unperturbed by most surface undulations.

But apart from that, the drivetrain remains quite refined. Its "off-road" mode immediately sends more power to the back, lifts the car a bit and automatically engages "hill descent control". And given its wide track, large section tyres and fistfuls of torque (480Nm), it takes on slushy terrain with remarkable ease. This broad, swooping estate is clearly a far more tasteful and aesthetic alternative to many an SUV. →





But it's on the inside where it gets really good. Volvo has thrown plenty of technological doohickeys into the V90, including automatic brake mitigation (prompting the car to come to a grinding halt should it detect an obstruction immediately in front of it), a heads-up display, lane detection – the works. Even the front seats are equipped with a gentle massage function, which, when paired with some Marvin Gaye playing on that sublime Bowers & Wilkins system (in “concert” mode, no less), make for a masterclass in evening commutes.

If there's anything that can get our collective and perplexing aversion to estates to thaw out, it's a car like the V90 CC. It's got the looks, the tech and the refinement to be the ideal, albeit expensive, ambassador for more cars of its ilk, and it works as the perfect bridge between sedans and SUVs with its sleek profile and the brawn that it hides underneath. But besides being a very capable car, the V90 manages to tick the right boxes that qualify it as a Volvo. It remains self-assuredly relaxed, unpretentious and sensible in its bearing. It's everything I expected a Volvo estate to be. ∞



## VOLVO V90 CC

### WHAT WE LIKE

Looks, space, comfort, interiors, versatility

### WHAT WE DON'T

Cabin noise, turbo-lag