



NORSE MYTHOLOGY

A rugged estate with the ability to traverse a Scandinavian forest in comfort, safety and luxury – it doesn't get more Volvo than that, as **Gavin D'Souza** finds out on the icy roads of North Sweden.

The Volvo V90 is the estate version of the S90, our favourite new luxury sedan of 2016. The V90 Cross Country is the V90's more rugged alter ego, and this is the one that's coming to India. Why the Cross Country? The reason is simple. Estates or station wagons have never been popular in India because of SUVs which offer the same utility and added rough-road ability in a more desirable shape. So if an estate is to sell in India, it has to offer a

little something special. Audi took the high-performance route with its RS6 Avant, and Volvo is going the 'rugged' way with its V90 Cross Country.

It's not just for show though. The chassis was thoroughly re-engineered from the standard V90, with ground clearance raised by 60mm to an SUV-baiting 210mm. All-wheel drive is standard and comes with an off-road mode built in, and, with adaptive air suspension, the whole chassis setup is more akin to the XC90 than the S90. ➔



It's a looker too, enhancing the S90's cool restraint with rugged bits all over. First off, the shape isn't boxy like Volvo estates of old, or even like the XC90 for that matter. It has a sloping rear windscreen and the haunches curve out nicely beneath the signature Volvo LED tail-lamps. The 'toughened-up' front and rear bumpers aren't overdone, and neither is the black cladding that runs around the car. The big, chunky alloy wheels on our test car certainly looked good, so let's hope these come to our market too.

Volvo has been renowned for its practical and safety-focused estates for decades, so who better to push this wagon renaissance in India. But will this jacked-up estate be enough to woo Indian buyers back to a body style they've long since abandoned?

It's virtually identical to the S90 sedan from the dashboard until the



The exquisite cabin from the S90 returns almost unchanged. Lighter colours likely for India.

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Country's ride and handling either. Over the few bumps we did encounter though, it seems the raised ride height hasn't compromised comfort, but then again, that's also the air suspension at play. Speaking of which, there isn't a raise/lower function like in some other air-suspended cars. Instead, the car chooses a preset ride height and firmness setting based on the mode you're in – Eco, Rough Road, Comfort or Dynamic. Again, the steering isn't for the enthusiast, as we discovered in greater detail when we were let loose on a frozen lake bed (see box). It's a bit too light and lacking in feedback to be thoroughly enjoyable, but it should be good enough to let you make a quick lane change on the expressway.

The V90 Cross Country will go on sale in the middle of this year at an expected price of Rs 60-65 lakh (ex-showroom). This puts it bang in between the S90 and the XC90, in a region where Volvo

doesn't currently have any other offerings. Volvo knows it's a niche product and doesn't plan to sell more than 100 of them per year in India. However, it's worth noting that Audi will be launching its own rugged estate, the A6 AllRoad, and Mercedes could bring its E-class All-Terrain, both direct rivals for the V90 Cross Country. So we could suddenly go from having no crossover luxury estates to having three. Traditionally, Volvos aren't as popular as their German counterparts in the sedan and SUV segments, but this could be the one time the Swedish brand has the advantage. The V90 CC takes everything we love about the S90 and adds loads more practicality and SUV levels of go-anywhere ability. Plus, aside from safety, Volvo globally is famous for its estate cars, and there's no doubt that the handful of target customers know this. And as estate cars go, this is one of the best you can get.

While the V90 Cross Country is available with a 'TB' petrol engine – a supercharged and turbocharged four-cylinder with over 300hp – Volvo says it will only consider bringing it to India if a demand for it ever arises. What we get is the 2.0-litre diesel, but not the 190hp D4 from the S90, but rather an upgraded 235hp D5 that's 10hp up from even the D5 in the XC90. We didn't really get to push it – less because of the speed limit, more because of the sheet ice spread liberally over the roads – but first impressions were good. It may be heavier than an S90 but it's still lighter than an XC90, so the 480Nm of torque is more than ample. Power delivery is not ferocious, so enthusiast drivers shouldn't go into this expecting anything more, and, as with the S90, the driving experience is far more relaxed; also the reason you won't lament the absence of shift paddles.

luggage is a bit easier.

The India-spec V90 Cross Country will be the cream of the crop, with all the bells and every last whistle, including radar-based cruise control, a heads-up display, heated and powered front seats with memory, the superb touchscreen with loads of apps and smartphone connectivity, a massive panoramic sunroof and that incredible Bowers & Wilkins audio system.

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The extremely Scandinavian winter, combined with mostly straight and smooth roads, meant we didn't really get a good indication of the V90 Cross

rear seats. The delightfully clutter-free and restrained dash returns with the vertically oriented touchscreen taking centre stage, flanked by slim and upright air con vents.

Our test car had black leather upholstery, but the more soothing, lighter colours for both the leather and the unpolished wood trim should be available in India. Those very well-contoured, powered front seats make a comeback and though they're superb on their own, perhaps a few more adjustment options – like for squab length and bolster thickness – wouldn't

have gone amiss. The back seats are similarly comfortable, with ample legroom and great support. Thigh support could have been a bit better, but then the headroom – thanks to the lengthened roof – is much better than in the S90 sedan.

Then, of course, there's every station wagon's raison d'être – the luggage area. With the second row in place, you get 560 litres of luggage space, and with it folded, that number climbs to 1,526 litres, so you will never be left wanting. And because it's lower to the ground than an SUV, loading your

SAFE ICE

APART FROM OUR drive out on Swedish country roads in the V90 Cross Country, Volvo also had a special treat in store for us. A frozen lake with a track plotted out. And the best part? No training, no excessive rules or regulations; just a quick safety briefing and we were let loose on the cold stuff. Imagine that, a company most famous for safety encouraging us to turn the safety systems off.

At our disposal were not just a fleet of V90 CCs, but also XC90 TB hybrids and V40 Cross Country. All equipped with studded tyres and all-wheel drive, of course.

The V90 actually proved the trickiest to drive

with its long wheelbase and mass over the rear. The hybrid XC90 TB was surprisingly composed, apart from some body roll (silent electric drifting, anyone?). But it was the tiny V40 CC with its superb hydraulic steering that was the most fun to boot around the track fast, and sideways.



VOLVO V90 CROSS COUNTRY D5

Price	Rs 60-65 lakh (estimated)
L/W/H	4939/1879/1543mm
Wheelbase	2941mm
Engine	4 cyls, 1969cc, twin turbo-diesel
Power	235hp at 4000rpm
Torque	480Nm at 1750-2250rpm
Gearbox	8-speed auto
Boot capacity	560-1526 litres
Kerb weight	2440 kg
Fuel tank	60 litres
Tyre size	235/50 R19