

One of the best Volvos yet



The interior of the V50 Wagon featured an innovation centre stack for audio and HVAC controls which are only about a half-inch thick. This version will not be available in Canada.

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The T5 AWD, with the six-speed (I didn't try the automatic), certainly does put performance into the littlest Volvo, not to mention cargo and people space. The wagon has 417 litres of space behind the rear seats, 717 litres with them folded and a total passenger volume of 1,307 litres.

My six-foot, two-inch co-driver rode in the back seat on a side trip to Gibraltar and found it tight but not oppressive, with a five-foot, 10-inch driver behind the wheel. However, he said it would have been impossible with a person the same height as him in the driver's seat while he rode in the back. But in both scenarios, he agreed headroom was sufficient.

Coming back down the mountains to Malaga in the T5 AWD, there was a hint of plowing at the front end under hard braking while turning into a descending switch back, which was not unexpected. Otherwise it felt extremely tight, pointed well and did not have that feeling of the steering wheel being dead on centre, which you get a fair amount in AWD vehicles.

The V50, and the S40 for that matter, are very handsome looking with a hint of aggression seeming to lurk just below the skin line. The "cat walk" sill at the window line and the standout taillight treatment debuted on when the S80 was launched remain signature Volvo design cues.

The interior is contemporary and comfortable with the usual attention to seating comfort Volvo has made a virtue in their vehicles. An innovative feature is the centre control stack looking like a Bang & Olufsen TV remote. Only about a half-inch thick, there is actually an open space behind it stretching to the firewall with a little cubby space behind at its base just about right of a wallet or 407 transponder.

It comes in brushed aluminum, dark wood, or in the base model, a plastic that matches the interior. There is also a see-through "Ice Aqua" version available in Europe that remains in the pondering stage for North America. With all the iMac inspired translucent plastic gizmos on the market, I think offering them now in a car is a bit behind the curve.

With a price point around \$35,000 (up slightly from the \$32,995 for the current V40) and a shade over a guesstimated \$41,000 fully-equipped (but not fully optioned), the V50 now has the athletic looks and Euro-style the target market of upwardly mobile next-gen professionals are aspiring to.

Volvo believes the V50 is ready to make inroads against Audi A4 Avant and Subaru Legacy 3.0 and probably the recently announced and pricier Jaguar X-Type wagon.

With Volvo's legendary commitment to safety, now coupled with performance to match its Nordic looks, Volvo has created not only an affordable alternative in the up-scale compact wagon segment but, perhaps, the new leader.

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