



Volvo V70

Featuring New V70 Estate



THINK BIG ESTATE CARS AND VOLVO IS sure to be one of the first names that springs to mind. Sweden's "warehouse on wheels" has been satisfying families for decades, not to mention more than a few antiques dealers, assorted tradesmen and a big slice of the country set along the way – a feat at which it has proved singularly successful.

Volvo's venerable load-hauler was transformed with the 1993 introduction of the front-wheel drive 850, since when, mildly reworked S and V70s took over the reins. Now it's time for the V70 to give way to a successor. But when you're as successful as Volvo (with its estates accounting for a whopping 70 per cent of its worldwide business, about a third of the UK estate car market, and almost twice that in the US), this was no time to rock the boat.

The new V70, then, bears a striking resemblance to the old one, but don't be fooled by appearances. Based on the highly acclaimed S80 saloon platform, the all-new V70 seeks to offer more space than the old model, without being viewed as overly large, expensive or luxurious. "What you can see is all new, and everything else sits on a new S80-derived platform", is how one Volvo engineer put it. The new estate is 4-5cm wider and taller than its predecessor, but sports a 5cm-longer wheelbase within a slightly truncated overall length. This provides a

marginally longer, roomier load bay, as well as allowing a little more seat travel for tall drivers.

Initially, the new estate will go on sale in two guises: a 200bhp 2.4-litre LPT (light pressure turbo), together with a 250bhp 2.3-litre T5 flagship. Both are said to deliver more power and lower fuel consumption than their forerunners, while the 2.4 LPT is now a quieter, smoother operator, courtesy of the extensive internal revisions already introduced on normally aspirated engines. It also gains the variable valve timing now featured on all Volvo's engines.

In March, a 140bhp 2.5-litre diesel will be added to the line-up. This will be the bought-in Audi unit carried over from the present range to begin with, though Volvo will switch to its own in-house-developed oil-burner later. By July the full line-up will be nearing completion, with the addition of 140bhp and 170bhp non-turbo versions. Finally, by late summer, the pseudo off-roader, four-wheel drive Cross Country version will join the fray. Old-shape V70 variants will continue on sale (badged as V70 Classic) until their successors arrive. A five-speed, "fuzzy logic" automatic gearbox is available, but Volvo's Geartronic automatic – with sequential manual shifting – looks a more tempting option available on the petrol-driven turbo variants.

Continued on page 2

But where, you ask, is the *saloon* version in all this? Given that it would have been awfully close to (albeit a little shorter than) the S80, the absence of a booted, four-door variant is understandable. Instead, Volvo says that a new saloon will come later – “positioned somewhere between the S/V40 and S80” – although, so far, the company is keeping tight-lipped about exactly what designation it will wear.

Acknowledging the significant challenge to estate cars since MPVs appeared on the scene, Volvo has not been averse to employing a few MPV tricks itself. The back seat (although not removable, as on many MPVs) has been raised to give youngsters a better view out, while its 60/40-split, fold-flat backrests (complete with a trio of solid head restraints and three-point, inertia-reel seatbelts, naturally) now offer two recline positions – liberating a touch more luggage space when necessary.

Inside the V70, clever, practical ideas abound wherever you look. As well as a liberal supply of now-obligatory cupholders, the centre of the back seat contains a pop-up picnic table or worktop, and the rear half of the boot floor erects to provide a safe haven for the weekly shopping – complete with elasticated straps to prevent your bottles and Brillo pads from being flung far and wide. A neat little button on the side of the front passenger’s head restraint provides a convenient hook for your jacket, while a hard point on the passenger’s side of the centre console provides attachment for a range of “lifestyle” accessories, including ... yes, the inevitable “curry hook” – designed to save your takeaways from decorating the footwell on the way home.

Safety, naturally, is well to the forefront, with several new features joining Volvo’s already well-stocked catalogue. To the existing SIPS side impact protection and WHIPS whiplash protection systems, the new V70 adds Volvo’s unique side-impact inflatable curtain (IC). This consists of an array of mini airbags which inflate near-instantaneously to prevent occupants’ heads from contacting the pillars or side windows in a side-on collision.

The V70 introduces dual-stage airbags, which inflate to only 70 per cent capacity in a less severe (but still sufficient to risk injury) impact, or inflate fully in a more severe shunt. The passenger’s side airbag remains

optional, but now doesn’t cost any extra if you specify it.

The V70 heralds yet another safety first for Volvo, with the introduction of a rearward facing child safety seat using Isofix attachments. This allows infants up to about three years old to be carried in the safest possible way, after which they can graduate to optional booster cushions built into the back seat.

Adhesively bonded rather than spot-welded in all key areas, the V70’s body is claimed to be 70 per cent more rigid than the old model’s. And it certainly feels so on the road. As before, the range-topping T5 betrays plenty of sporting firmness over the bumps, yet both versions we sampled impressed with their solid, unburstable feel, taut, alert handling and impressively subdued levels of road noise. The V70 is no lightweight, though, so neither version feels quite as lively (or uncouth) as the raw horsepower numbers might suggest. Yet this is testimony more to the fluid, refined, and more involving way the new V70 departs itself on the road, rather than reflecting any real paucity of performance.

VERDICT

“Replacing the Swedish ‘crown jewels’ was never going to be a walkover”, he admits, yet Volvo’s British design chief Peter Horbury and his team have had a hugely successful stab at it. The new V70 is bigger, better riding, notably more refined and, we think, better looking than the model it replaces. Volvo has also capitalised strongly on the opportunity to boost its load-carrier’s accommodation and all-round appeal a little, as well as regaining some of the ground hijacked by MPVs in recent years.

It’s not cheap, and still lacks some of the cachet that a BMW or Mercedes wagon can muster. Yet despite knocking on the door of £30,000 at the upper reaches of the line-up, the new V70’s got the pair comfortably licked for value. Its roundly accomplished road manners, unrivalled safety credentials and earthy, no-nonsense proficiency look set to keep the Swedish maker’s load-luggers where they’ve been accustomed to being ever since Volvo’s very first estate car (the PV445 Duett in 1953) appeared on the scene – right at the front of the pack.



FACTS AND FIGURES

BODY	5-door estate				
length x width - excl mirrors (cm)	471 x 181 (473 x 186 - V70 XC 4x4)				
trim levels	standard, S and SE				
ENGINES	2.4 (140bhp)	2.4 (170bhp)	2.4 LPT	2.3 T5	2.5D
	front-mounted, transverse, 5 cylinder in line				
valves/fuel	DOHC, 20-valve; electronic multi-point petrol injection (70litre/15.4gal tank)				direct injection diesel
capacity (cc)	2435	2435	2435	2319	2461
power (bhp/rpm)	140/5700	170/5700	200/6000	250/5200	140/4000
torque (lb ft/rpm)	162/3750	170/4500	210/1800-5000	243/2400-5200	214/1900-3100
TRANSMISSION	5-speed manual or 5 speed fuzzy logic automatic or 5-speed Geartronic automatic				5-speed manual
CHASSIS					
suspension - front	independent, MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs, lower arms with anti-roll bar				
- rear	independent, coil springs, multi-link, with anti-roll bar				
steering	rack and pinion, with hydraulic power assistance				
brakes	3.0 turns/10.9m turning circle on 195 tyres (2.8turns/11.9m circle with 225 section tyres) ventilated discs front, solid discs rear; with standard ABS and EBD (electronic brake force distribution)				
PERFORMANCE					
0-62mph (sec) (man/auto)	10.1/11.1	9.0/10.0	7.9/8.3	7.1/7.5	10.7/ n/a
maximum speed (mph) (man/auto)	124/121	130/127	139/136	155/149	124 n/a
overall mpg (Government combined)	tba	tba	30.7 (27.4 auto)	30.4 (27.2 auto)	43.5
CO₂ emissions (g/km)	tba	tba	220 (246 auto)	222 (249 auto)	172
luggage space - seats up/down - ltrs (cu ft)	485/1641†		(17.1/58.0†)	† laden to roof	
ABI insurance group	14E	14E	14E	16E	13E

