



Volvo S60

Featured model: T5 Automatic



EVEN THE LEAST EXPENSIVE model in the S60 range (see R0125) doesn't leave you feeling hard done by. Nevertheless, we feel obliged (all right ... irresistibly tempted) also to report on the flagship T5 SE, to discover what this top-of-the-range model has to offer.

Primarily, of course, it offers performance in a big way, thanks to its high-pressure turboed, five-cylinder engine that pumps out a formidable 250bhp. Forget the brutish, tyre-smoking power delivery of the original 850T, though; in this case the fiery temperament is carefully controlled – indeed, the S60 is as docile as you like in traffic. However, dramatic acceleration is only a footstep away, especially once the melodious motor has hit 2500rpm.

After newly experiencing the five-speed Geartronic automatic transmission (an £1100 extra), we are, rather to our surprise, willing converts to this two-pedal version. According to Volvo, 0-62mph takes a mere 0.3sec longer than with the manual 'box, maximum speed drops by only 3mph, and overall fuel consumption is up by just 2.7mpg.

This is a modest penalty for a system that provides smooth, fully automatic gearshifts if left to its own devices, or excellent manual changes if you want to do it yourself. With so much grunt from the engine, the sensitive part-throttle kickdown in automatic mode can sometimes give an unwanted and clumsy double downshift. Manual operation eliminates this, yet still provides slick, jerk-free shifts with a flick of the wrist – very satisfying.

The earlier T5's unruly torque steer on hard acceleration has been virtually eliminated. There's no more than a hint of it if you floor the throttle in first gear. Don't expect this sporty Swede inevitably to come with hard-riding suspension, either, even though it's equipped with 45-Series tyres. It jiggles and jitters over broken surfaces, but the firm ride is generally shock-free and untroubled.

The Continental Sport Contacts on the test car gave tenacious road grip (without any twitchy "tramlining") to complement the car's agile chassis and responsive steering that is, nevertheless, somewhat short on informative feedback. The brakes are first class – not over-sensitive as on the 2.0T.

Despite the underbonnet changes, the T5 remains unaltered inside from the more modestly powered S60s. Sensibly so, too; why change a winning formula? It gives a comfortable driving position with excellent ergonomics, as well as generous accommodation – and all with build quality to match the best in class.

VERDICT

The S60 is an outstandingly good car, with this T5 version proving to be a cracking way to top off the range. It's easily a match for its much-vaunted German rivals and comes at a price that rubs salt into the wound. This is a copper-bottomed classic, must-drive model if you're shopping in the stylish sports saloon market.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	★★★★○○
Handling/steering	★★★★○○
Comfort	★★★★○○
Space/practicality	★★★★○○

THE S60 RANGE

size and type upper medium (premium-priced) four-door saloon

trim levels S, SE

engines (all turbocharged) petrol: 5 cylinder/2.0 litre/180bhp, 5/2.3/250, 5/2.4/200; bi-fuel: 5/2.4/140 (LPG/CNG); diesel: 5/2.4/163

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (5-speed stepped automatic, with torque converter, available on all models)

notable features wide selection of trim, equipment and safety features, laminated side windows, approach/home-safe lighting, load/bag holder, rear seat backrest releases in boot, "space ball" gear lever (manual), integrated booster cushion (optional)

BRIEF SPECIFICATION

engine 2319cc, 5-cylinder petrol, 20 valves; 250bhp/243 lb ft with high-pressure turbocharger; 80-litre fuel tank

drive 5-speed Geartronic stepped automatic with manual sequential override; front-wheel drive

suspension front: independent coil spring/damper struts, lower arms, anti-roll bar. Rear: independent coil springs, multi-links, anti-roll bar

tyres 225/45ZR17 on 7in alloy wheels

brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with standard electronic ABS, EBD and brake assistance

0-62mph* 7.1sec

max speed* 152mph **maker's figures*
official (combined) mpg 27.7

LIKES ...

side-to-side dual temperature controls
door pull/armrests help lateral location
double pockets on both front seatbacks
huge (80-litre) fuel tank

and GRIPES

lumbar support control awkward to turn
rear hump-console restricts leg space
space-saver temporary spare wheel
metallic paint costs £500 extra