

FIRST
DRIVE

Volvo V70 Cross Country



DESPITE ITS MACHO MONIKER, the Cross Country is designed primarily to cope with snow and ice, mud and dirt tracks; Volvo didn't want to make it a full-blown off-roader for fear of compromising its on-road ability. In any case, its Land Rover relative (by takeover) is the serious mud-mangling member of the extended family now.

While the Cross Country is unmistakably a V70, a robust-looking body kit, a wider front track and a ground clearance to rival that of a Cherokee or a Discovery give a broad hint that this is something distinctly different.

And so it proves, spectacularly so in our case, as the clever four-wheel drive hardware and traction control provided stable grip over rough, icy terrain in the recent downfall of snow.

But on the road the Cross Country proves similarly impressive. Volvo appears to have got the car's dual-role compromise just right.

The V70's handling, in both this and standard form, isn't as agile and the smooth, fluid steering isn't as pin-sharp as the S60/S80's, but the car corners well with the slack taken up, so to speak. Here, though, the high build means there's a little more cornering lean.

The suspension is comfortably soft riding, with an underlying firmness apparent only on broken surfaces, with roadholding that never puts a foot wrong – even when powering hard out of a turn. Road noise from the dual-purpose tyres is

quite prominent, though. There's some roof bar wind hum, too.

At the moment there's Hobson's choice of engine, but that's all right because the five-pot 2.4 turbo is a lovely motor that's smooth and swift (0-60mph in under 9sec) and gives quiet, relaxed motorway cruising.

In this case it was complemented by Volvo's optional five-speed adaptive automatic transmission which, while not giving the slickest of kickdown changes, otherwise delivers syrupy smooth shifts and cleverly judged part-throttle downchanges.

The only difference inside this leather trimmed, generously equipped upmarket holdall is the addition of a front passenger's grab rail. Otherwise it's pure V70. This means that the cabin and driving position are workmanlike and comfortable, with plenty of seat and steering wheel adjustments to suit various drivers.

VERDICT

The Cross Country entered the burgeoning "soft roader" market rather earlier than most and sets a standard that won't be easy to beat. It offers the surefooted security and capability of a 4x4, with the comfort, equipment and handling of a conventional car – and with few compromises. What's more, you don't get that intimidating feeling that big butch off-roaders can sometimes engender. It's a fine all-rounder.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

THE V70 CROSS COUNTRY RANGE

size and type large, executive 4x4 estate car (premium priced)

trim levels T, TSE

engines petrol: 5 cylinder/2.4 litre/200bhp with light pressure turbo. diesel: available late-2001

drive permanent four-wheel drive with viscous coupling; 5-speed manual (5-speed stepped and Geartronic – with manual sequential shift facility – automatics optional)

notable features 209mm ground clearance, load-compensating suspension, 1800kg towing capacity, ozone-converting radiator, state-of-the-art safety features, approach/see-you-home lighting, climate control with air quality system (SE), huge variety of optional equipment packs/accessories

LIKES ...

excellent vision (rear headrests fold) rear mid backrest converts to armrest hinge-down rear dog/luggage guard grocery bag hooks/neat stowage areas forward-folding front passenger seat

and GRIPES

dipped beams always on when running bad screen reflections (light fascia top) load height still limited under load cover steel/space-saver spare wheel/tyre over-zealous seatbelt warning chime

VITAL STATISTICS

length x width (folded mirrors)	473x188
front- legroom	93-112
- headroom (with sunroof)	89-96
rear- typical legroom	103
- typical kneeroom	79
- headroom	94
- hiproom	141
load space (all seats in use) (litres/cu ft)	490/17.4
load length (seats up/folded)	101/168
load width	113-137
load sill height (inside/outside)	0/67
boot/load aperture height	39/77