

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

VOLUME 11 NUMBER 3
MAY-JUNE 2012

GOODGUYS SOUTHWEST NATIONALS
ROUTE 66 IN THE CENTENNIAL CORVETTE
2.0L TWIN TURBO BMW 528i
ALL-NEW ALFA ROMEO-BASED DODGE DART
FORD EXPLORER
FORD TAURUS, FLEX AND MUSTANG
FIAT 500 ABARTH IN NEVADA
JAGUAR ALIVE DRIVING EXPERIENCE
MERCEDES-BENZ 4MATIC SEDANS AND COUPES
VOLVO POLESTAR PERFORMANCE TUNING

Volvo XC70 T6 AWD
with Polestar
performance tuning

take this volvo and punch it

a "blue thread" known as polestar is the power behind the punch

by joe sage



If you haven't noticed that Volvo has gone far beyond its prior reputation of building your father's very safe family box, you haven't been paying attention. If you haven't noticed Polestar—an outfit behind racing development at Volvo since 1996—you're not alone.

Volvo and racing? Make no mistake about it. Even when your father did have a family box, Volvo was red hot in Europe, dominating on the race circuit with their "flying bricks." Today, a special C30 is the most successful Volvo race car ever. And behind it all? Polestar, of course—Volvo Cars Official Partner for sixteen years.

Last year, Volvo raced a prototype engine that was tested as the most powerful in the world. Almost one in every four cars on the road in Sweden is a Volvo, and a high enthusiast level has created a huge aftermarket there. Volvo is also the region's most common rally car. Polestar is famous for racing in Scandinavia and in Europe overall.

polestar for the people

Despite being effective on the race circuit, Polestar wasn't well known in the wider consumer market. That is ready to change in a big way, with Polestar Performance. Think AMG at Mercedes-Benz, M at BMW, quattro GmbH at Audi, and you have a rough idea.

Some nine years after Polestar's core inception, the broader, consumer-oriented Polestar Performance project was launched in 2005. Sales began in 2009, and the products hit North America by the end of 2011.

Think of Polestar Performance as a "blue thread" that connects a series of specially amped-up Volvo cars, suggests Geno Effler, VP of public affairs for Volvo Cars of North America. The cars that are connected by this thread cover much of the Volvo lineup: a series of vehicles equipped with the T5 five-cylinder turbo and several with the T6 six-cylinder turbo.

the full volvo performance range

Effler introduced us first to a tantalizing Polestar car we would not be driving—the blue C30 Polestar Performance Concept Prototype, or PCP (shown at upper right). The stock C30, with its T5 five-cylinder turbo and manual transmission, is already a favorite of ours. So what could the team do to improve it? Start with the four-wheel-drive system from a Volvo V50 wagon. Work the engine up to more than 450 horsepower. And hang on. "It's still very driveable," says Effler, "all based on standard off-the-shelf parts. More or less."

Joe Haslem, brand manager for the XC60, XC90 and C70, introduced us to the cars we would drive. The XC70 (righthand page, bottom) is in its third generation, has one of the highest owner retention rates in the Volvo lineup and has certainly outlasted its nearest former competitor, the Audi allroad, by years. With the Audi out of the field, Volvo reminds us there are some other AWD wagons available, but none with off-road capability.

The smaller and more streamlined XC60, introduced in 2009, is the best seller in the XC range. Volvo positions the XC60 to go up against the best of the Germans: the Audi Q5, BMW X3 and Mercedes-Benz GLK.

It was "hands off" the Volvo C30 Polestar Performance Concept Prototype (PCP), but hands on the rest. Here we also see the S60 T6 AWD R-Design (driven in our Jan/Feb 2012 issue) and the C70 Inscription with its retractable hardtop down. A quick stop on the Apache Trail, then on to the top in the Volvo XC70 with Polestar Performance.



Starting with the XC60, we encounter the complexities of the company's Polestar Performance identity mechanisms. The Polestar vehicle in this niche is the Volvo XC60 T6 R-Design. Polestar is standard in this vehicle, so it has no blue badge. You just have to know.

The XC70, on the other hand, is standard as a T6 (six-cylinder turbo) AWD wagon rated at 300 hp. Add the optional Polestar Performance upgrade, and you have 325 hp. And a blue badge.

Sort of like the XC60 R-Design, the C70 hardtop convertible has Polestar Performance tuning available in an upgraded C70 Inscription special edition, with gloss black grille, LED daytime running lights with chrome trim, large wheels, interior upgrades. Despite its being built-in in the Inscription, as with the XC60 R-Design, in this instance there is a blue badge, unlike the XC60.

And despite no PCP for the masses, there is a C30 T5 R-Design, with that manual transmission standard. But despite being an R-Design like the XC60, Polestar is an option on this one, so there is a blue badge.

If we have a blue badge absence/presence incorrect here, it underscores the point: it's inconsistent.



but you already bought your volvo?

If you have an eligible Volvo, you can add the Polestar element. This works for any T5 from 2008, or any T6 from 2011. The cost for a T5 upgrade is \$1295, which brings you a 23-horsepower gain and 37 new lb-ft of torque. For the T6, cost is \$1495 and gains are 25 hp and 30 lb-ft. The upgrade can be financed, but it is only warrantied if port-installed on a new vehicle and listed

KEEP RIGHT >>





on the original new-car Monroney sticker.

The upgrade only takes about 10 minutes. The whole operation is basically simply a flash reprogram of the ECM (Engine Control Module). If you're starting to think there should be a 99-cent app for that, you're probably not alone, but this is a serious piece of technology, prepared specifically for the Volvo T5 and T6 engines by those who know them best, and tailor-made to work with every aspect of the vehicle's drivetrain, suspension, and overall comfort and feel. It has no impact on fuel economy. When Volvo says it's "true power, not a bolt-on solution," the point is pretty well driven home that—even if just a chip flash—this is the real deal.

Turbo boost is increased. Spark timing is re-optimized, as are fuel mixture and a few other details of already-electronically-controlled engine operation. Finally, throttle mapping is recalibrated to make the best use of the new power running through the drivetrain.

performance, safety, green and blue

Power! Performance! Volvo! The more traditional spirit of Volvo does shine through, as Polestar Performance promises to deliver the goods "in a responsible way," with safety and environmental impacts always prime considerations. They also promise to reduce warranty costs and provide positive customer experiences—through full control of the ECM, from design to installation to service—always a good reason for internally integrated add-on engineering, versus do-it-yourselfing.

Volvo brought the whole Polestar Performance line-up to Arizona this winter, so we could give them a try on a variety of roads.

hitting the dirt and the pavement

We almost had more cars than time to drive them, although we did have a generous two full days of driving time. And we had some great, hours-long routes.

The first day, we took a Polestar-upgraded Volvo XC70 on a loop that concentrated on the roughest part—the Apache Trail, from Apache Junction in the east Valley, up along a tight, sometimes mildly rough, often cliffhanging route past Canyon and Apache Lakes, to Roosevelt Lake and back to pavement on AZ Highway 188. From there, we drove up to the Beeline Highway (AZ 87) and back to the Valley. Those unpaved roads were the heart of this route, though.

You can tell by our cover photo and the lead photo on the previous page that the XC70 was very well-matched to conditions (and exuberant driving). Its low center of gravity, coupled with all-wheel-drive confidence and great traction systems, came through for us mile after mile. Exactly what we got from the extra 25 hp is hard to say. We certainly wouldn't have asked to reduce what we had, nor did we find ourselves needing more. And in traction conditions, we probably benefited from 30 more lb-ft of torque. All in all, the XC70 remains a very well-balanced tool for the job, and the Polestar Performance update is an easy choice, some icing on the cake, on top of a vehicle with a base price of \$39,100.

The second day, we took the top-selling XC60 up the Beeline past Payson, over the hills and through the woods, out on the open plains and across I-17, to lunch in Oak Creek, south of Sedona. We also deviated from

The little blue badge tells the tale—though not always. Our XC70 picked up some dust along the Apache Trail, but was not in the least bit rattled. The XC60 took us off road a little, but spent more time on the open highway. Our last round was with one out of this sea of C30s, and with the C70.

the map for a small amount of dirt time (pictured left and below), just enough to get its feel. We hit the limits of that trail pretty quickly and were glad to have the extra clearance and shorter wheelbase of the XC60, to turn around and return to the highway. The XC60, naturally aspirated and in two-wheel drive, starts at \$33,300, but moves to \$39,450 with the T6 and AWD. The R-Design version, with Polestar Performance standard plus other amenities and features, is \$43,700.

On our last afternoon, we grabbed both the C30 pocket rocket and the C70 hardtop convertible—two of our longtime favorites, with their standard 227-horse turbocharged inline-5-cylinder engines (and the C30 with its available manual). Would we spring for \$1295 to raise the horsepower to 250? Sure, why not. The C30 starts in the mid-20s, a bargain, though to get Polestar, you need the \$27,450 R-Design, plus the \$1295 add-on, now pushing \$30k. The C70 is in loftier terrain already, just over \$40,000, so moving to \$44,350 with performance plus a host of upgraded amenities is appealing.

Bottom line, it may be a challenge to compete with those Mercedes AMGs, BMW Ms and Audi Ss and RSs, with their many hardware upgrades, by providing what still amounts to a chip upgrade. But again, this chip upgrade is conceived from the bottom up and the inside out, so it actually makes a very strong case for enhancing all the hardware it's connected to.

The very presence of the Polestar heritage and power options brings new life and a performance halo to the whole Volvo brand. And the specific option brings some extra excitement to any model you buy, that it's available on. When you show your friends and neighbors what Volvo is all about today, your presentation will be all the better with Polestar in place. ■

