

masterstroke

by Joe Sage
Volvo's premium wagon conquers a wide range of categories

If you were never a wagon person, this will change your mind. If you thought utility meant a compromise in performance, or that performance meant a compromise in utility, this will change your mind. If you never thought twice about Volvo in days gone by, this will change your mind. Even if you thought you could never live without a manual transmission, this may not change your mind, but the rest makes it worth the tradeoff. The new Volvo V90 Cross Country is a tour de force.

One minute, it reminds us of the luxurious new S90 sedan. The next, it reminds us of any premium SUV with 3500 pounds of tow capacity and more than eight inches (or nine with air suspension) of ground clearance, in fact beating many on both. It even reminds us a bit of the one-of-a-kind Dodge Magnum, one of the sexier multi-personality vehicles of the new millennium, built from 2005 to 2008 in a variety of forms including all-wheel-drive, R/T and SRT-8 models, showcasing the best of Detroit in an all-American form. And if the same thing were done by the Europeans? That just

might be the new Volvo V90 Cross Country. (The Volvo is closest to the Magnum R/T in horsepower.) Bonus: the Volvo's fuel mileage is about 30 percent higher. Bonus two: Magnum ceased production almost a decade ago, and while used ones are still a cult favorite, you can buy a brand new, fully warrantied Volvo V90 CC today.

In the finest traditions of Scandinavian design, Volvo has rethought even the most familiar details. A clean sheet approach to the car's touchscreen interface brings features and services that quickly become intuitive and often prove more extensive and useful than average. You start the car with a prominent burly and beautiful knob on the console—an approach that will never be confused with some other button while you're driving (although its chrome bezel is hot as Hades on an Arizona summer day).

We had been highly impressed with the vehicle at launch. Our additional week confirmed this and then some. Factor number one is the both supercharged and turbocharged 2.0-liter powerplant, as found on the equally impressive and endlessly award-winning XC90 and S90, pumping out 316 hp

while getting 30 mpg. Next is the interior space, with cargo capacity rivaling utilities and over six flat feet, enough to work as your lodging on an off-road excursion. Add to that the Volvo's carlike center of gravity and stance, which make it a champ in daily driving—including the aggressive kind. Top it off with instant traction all-wheel drive (plus that ground clearance and towing power), and this is hard to top in the familiar realm of vehicles perfect for both the country club and the great outdoors.

Volvo's research shows that their typical user will gain great benefit from sedan-level roof access for skis, kayaks, cargo boxes, surfboards and bikes, with interior cargo volume rivaling an SUV.

A skim of the specifications tells the rest—the car comes remarkably thoroughly equipped at the premium level in the mid-50s. We are sticklers for excellent audio at a reasonable price (or included), and we have no quibbles with \$3200 for the stand-out Bowers & Wilkins system. We hit some challenging roads in the V90 CC without using the air suspension, but would still buy it, just in case.

We recall one of the national car magazines, about 25 years ago, declaring a certain German all-wheel-drive performance sedan (a rarity then) to be "the best car to drive from Tierra del Fuego to Prudhoe Bay." The Volvo V90 Cross Country could surely take that crown today. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	2.0L supercharged+turbo 4-cyl
TRANS / DRIVE	8-spd auto / instant traction AWD
HP/TORQUE	316 hp / 295 lb-ft
0-TO-60 MPH / TOP SPEED	6.0 sec / 140 mph
SUSPENSION	dbl wishbone front/rear integral axle
STEERING	rack & pinion elec power assist
WHEELS	19-in alloys /opt 20-in diamond-cut
TIRES	model-specific all-season tires
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	194.4 in / 115.8 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	8.3 in (w opt air susp 9.1 in
LEGROOM	42.2 / 35.9 in
CARGO VOLUME	53.9 cu.ft
WEIGHT / TOW CAPACITY	4221 lb / 3500 lb
FUEL CAPACITY / FUEL	15.9 gal / 91+ octane
MPG	22/30/25 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$55,300
INCLUDES:	panoramic moonroof/power sunshade, 19" diamond-cut wheels, dual tailpipes, active bending LED headlights, auto high beam, Thor's hammer DRL, LED fogs w corner illumination, LED taillights/side markers, high-pressure headlight washers, front grille w gloss black bars, matt black inserts, chrome frame, silver lower skid plate, tinted windows rear/

cargo, lighted door handles, leather seats, 10-way power front seats w 4-way power lumbar and memory, heated front seats/wheel, dark walnut inlays, Sensus nav w 9" touchscreen (6-mo subscrip), 12.3" driver display (binnacle), drive modes, 330w 10-sprk audio, USB/AUX, SiriusXM (6 mos), Apple/Android, clean zone air system, illuminated aluminum sill plates, auto-dim mirror, keyless entry/start, leather remote key, hands free power tailgate, semi-automatic load cover, rear camera, rear park assist, power-fold rear headrests, 12v power & load strap in cargo area, temp spare w jack, aluminum cargo scuff plate, Volvo On-Call (remote lock/unlock, 6 months send-to-car & vehicle tracking, semi-autonomous pilot assist w/adaptive cruise, collision avoidance w low & high speed mitigation, pedestrian-cyclist-large animal detection, run-off road mitigation & run-off road protection, lane departure warning, road sign info, driver alert, blind spot info, cross traffic alert....incl	
METALLIC PAINT	595
CONVENIENCE PACKAGE: 360° surround camera, HomeLink, mirror compass, park assist, luxe interior lighting, heated washer nozzles, grocery bag holder	1950
BOWERS & WILKINS PREMIUM AUDIO	3200
GRAPHICAL HEADS-UP DISPLAY	900
CHILD SEAT OUTER	500
PREMIUM REAR AIR SUSPENSION	1200
DESTINATION CHARGE:	995
TOTAL	\$64,640

CASTLE HOT SPRINGS ROAD

We repeated a significant part of our route from the Volvo V90 Cross Country launch event a few months back. N. Castle Hot Springs Road heads north from Highway 74 past the west end of Lake Pleasant. Paved at first, it passes access points to various boat ramps, picnic sites and trailheads; at the right turn to Four Lane Boat Ramp, turn left to continue on Castle Hot Springs Road. The road soon turns to gravel. It's a rough road, even the smooth parts, subject to complete washout after a rain—unless you are in an off-road vehicle or, as we were, in the Volvo V90 Cross Country. In that case, you can just splash on through the worst of it. A neatly spaced row of palm trees marks historic Castle Hot Springs Resort, which is in its latest ongoing process of rebirth. If you take the road its full length, you emerge on Highway 74 almost at US 60 about 10 miles south of Wickenburg, a chance to grab lunch in that hospitable town. ■

