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MAIL TODAY

EXCITING TIMES

Volvo breaks free from its Plain Jane looks with the XC60 that comes loaded with some incredible features

By Ranojy Mukerji

THE perennial alternative choice for people who wish to buy vehicles with distinction, Volvo has finally managed to get a product that is more interesting to look at than the DTC's new Marcopolo buses. My subject today is the Volvo XC60, the most beautiful sport utility vehicle (SUV) in town.

Fortunately, Steve Mattin's 2008 design still carries some visual appeal — the XC60's sleek headlights and sharp creases blend well with the more traditional Volvo aesthetics. The styling of the XC60 is amazing — for decades we have been used to stodgy Volvos whose safety features were highly acclaimed, but looked less exciting than Air India's air hostesses. The interiors reminded you of Swedish minimalism — what we couldn't figure out is how a country with such hot-looking blondes could produce a vehicle like this.

The XC60 will make that perception history. Coming out of Volvo's Y20 platform, which in the initial stages shared technology with the Land Rover Freelander the XC60 not only looks good, but has some awesome safety features as well. The XC60 is Volvo's mainstream model, sized right for the average family. Outside, its lines are handsome and conservative, and nowhere near as boxy as Volvo wagons and sedans of the past.

The styling does not look too bad either. With a design that is rakish on the outside, and more fashion-forward on the inside, the XC60 has a smooth, cohesive design throughout, and we venture to say that there are few who won't find it good-looking. It was designed by the same team that did the more aggressively styled S80 sedan, yet it is a little more refined in and formal.

In a class of crossovers that too often tend to look like mini-vans on stilts, the XC60's design has more grace, with shoulders that flow neatly from headlamps to taillights. The front headlamps have a nice sweep to them and the bi-xenon projectors have an excellent throw.

The XC60 is the one of the few vehicles in India to have Active Bending Lights (ABL), so whenever you turn the steering wheel the lights bend automatically to illuminate the area you are going into. We found this particularly useful when driving on mountains.

If the exteriors look edible, the



The XC60, like all Volvo vehicles, is incredibly safe and with the new design, very sexy to look at as well. If the exteriors ooze grace, the interiors can turn heads like a hot Swedish blonde.

interiors are scrumptious. Inside, you will see design attributes from other Volvos, like the 'floating' centre console with storage behind it, meshed with a more upright dash.

Contrasting two-tone upholstery and trims — including a centre console with wood (Nordic Light Oak) or metal finish — give the interiors a high-end look.

The driving position is fabulous and you get a commanding view of the world outside. The steering wheel is nice and chunky to hold and has the controls for the sound system. The tall roofline provides plenty of head space. Legroom could be twitchy in the back for those over six feet tall but for most of us it is just fine.

An interesting feature is the powered rear hatch door, so to open or close it, all you need to do is push a button on the centre console.

The instrument area on the XC60 is excellent. Two round dials house a speedo and a tach, but both have these large

LCD displays inside that give you all the information you need on the vehicle, including the status of the audio system.

The centre console can be a bit confusing initially because of the large number of buttons, including those for the built-in Bluetooth phone support, but one gets used to it over time.

YOU'LL need to familiarise yourself with the entire operation of the air-con system, because it is not very intuitive. The sound system is excellent and if you opt for the Dynaudio setup, you get Dolby Prologic sound.

Volvo has two diesel variants — D3 and D5 — in its line-up for India. The former is a 2.0-litre turbo-diesel that is front wheel drive only, but we drove the D5 with all-wheel-drive (AWD).

Volvo's very capable AWD has been tweaked for acceptable off-road performance, though it can never compete with the Freelander in this aspect. A Haldex clutch keeps things in

control, channelling power to wheels as and when necessary, even as the 210hp power coupled to a gargantuan 440Nm of torque means that the XC60 has the go anywhere capability. Try to get a 0-100 kmph time of 8.3 seconds for sheer acceleration from a SUV!

We wouldn't be talking Volvo if we were not talking safety and the XC60 has the best features in this department. An example is the laser-assisted city braking — whenever the sensors mounted on the front feel that you are getting too close to the vehicle in front of you, the vehicle brakes on its own.

Volvo was the first manufacturer to add features such as seat belts and airbags in all its vehicles, and the tradition continues with 10 airbags, including side inflatable curtains, whiplash protection, pyrotechnic seat belts — one can go on.

All this makes the XC60 incredibly safe and with the new design, very sexy to look at. The XC60 is loaded generously with cruise control, rain sensors and power everything, including the front seats. This is one delectable option in the race of the SUVs to woo us — we all are fond of free love, aren't we?

SPEC CHECK

Volvo XC60

BODY & CHASSIS

LENGTH

4,627mm

WIDTH

1,891mm

HEIGHT

1,713mm

WHEELBASE

2,774mm

SUSPENSION

(Front) McPherson Struts and coil springs; (Rear) torsion beam

FUEL TANK CAPACITY

70 litres

SEATING CAPACITY

5

GROUND CLEARANCE:

230mm

SEATING CAPACITY

5

BOOT SPACE

495 litres

BRAKES

Discs in front and electronic stability programme in the rear

ENGINE DETAILS

DIESEL

DISPLACEMENT

2,400cc, five cylinders, common-rail turbocharged diesel

MAXIMUM POWER

215 bhp @ 4000 rpm

MAXIMUM TORQUE

440 Nm @ 1500-3000 rpm

TRANSMISSION

6-speed; automatic

LAND ROVER FREELANDER2
₹37.4 lakh*

WHEN we test drove the Freelander2, we called it the best 4x4 in this segment. It is still a delightful vehicle to drive, though on overall power it may fall a bit short of the XC60. The main point is that it has a proper 4x4 system, unlike the XC60, which has a Haldex clutch driving an All Wheel Drive system, like the Q5 from Audi. The Freelander2 is also well-specified from the inside, though it does not convey the plushness of the Q5 or the XC60.

HOW THE COMPETITION STACKS UP

AUDI Q5
₹41.62 lakh*

THE Q5 has been a success in India, following its larger Q7 sibling. It's two diesel variants, the Q5 exhibits typical Audi qualities — plush interiors and space. The equipment levels are decent and even a sunroof is standard, though, despite its fabulous looks, it is utterly impractical in our country. Driving the Q5 is joy and the 2.0-litre engine shows no hesitation in zipping ahead at the slightest hint from the accelerator. The Q5 has an intuitive all-wheel-drive system (the 'Quattro'); it has Audi's signature scowling grille and LED illuminators; the boot is spacious.