

Volvo ditches diesel for its smallest SUV, but plumps up value

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Volvo's daring in its attempts at thinking ahead of the times, if I can call it that, comes from two strengths — one is its aggressive pricing strategy and the other is its Scandinavian heritage. Come to think of it, how many car makers can come away unscathed after claiming that the top speed in all their cars will be restricted to 180kmph, or that it is completely eliminating diesel engines from its portfolio or even that its target is to halve its fossil fuel car sales in the next five years.

Volvo's cars are still desirable, deliver more value than the competitors and have a modern, minimalist aesthetic. Case in point is the XC40 - it is still one of the best looking compact luxury SUVs there is, with a lot of features that have been borrowed from its larger siblings and offers the most value for the price. The 180kmph speed limit deadline has been set for Volvo's 2021 models, so the XC40 can be driven all the way up to 230kmph for now. But, its diesel engine has been taken out and instead a two-litre, turbocharged petrol engine has been shoe-horned into the bon-

net. The XC40 is getting a fresh position in the line-up and in comparison to competitors like the BMW X1, MINI Countryman and Mercedes-Benz GLA. The new model is the sporty XC40 T4 in its R Design trim variant.

Design and Cabin

The XC40 borrows a lot of its good looks from its bigger siblings in the Volvo SUV family. There are specific elements in its exterior design that make it look like an acceptable version of a compact SUV. A trait that helps it stand out when compared to some of the others which look like crossovers or raised hatchbacks. The trademark, vertically oriented tail lamps, the Thor-hammer LED headlamps and dual tone paint finish with the roof, and A and B pillars in a contrast glossy black finish give it a unique character. Dual chrome tailpipe finishers add a bit of sportiness to the rear. The XC40's longer wheelbase gives it a strong stance and also helps increase room for passengers in the cabin.

The cabin has Volvo written all over it, with its signature brand styling and features such as the dashboard's 9-inch touchscreen which offers controls for the infotainment, navigation and climate control, the rectilinear air conditioning vents and the leather-wrapped steering wheel. The XC40 T4 R Design's cabin trim reflects its hierarchy in the SUV model lineup; so it gets textured metal panels in the doors and dashboard, unlike the open-pore wood you'd

find in the bigger models. But it still gets a lot of useful stuff like the 12.3-inch digital instrument cluster with the centre section also throwing up the nav map. The wireless smartphone charger came in handy during my test drive, and the other good stuff were the 600W, 14-speaker Harman Kardon music system and radar-based assistance systems. You also get leather seats, a panoramic sunroof and a power tailgate.

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Performance

The XC40 T4 R Design will be the first model from Volvo Cars India to meet the new BS VI emission norms. The two-litre (1,969cc), four-cylinder, petrol engine produces 190hp of peak power and 300Nm of peak torque. The engine is mated to a 8-speed geartronic automatic transmission that is also available in a few other Volvo models. The diesel is out, so this powertrain is the only option. The engine is calm while idling, but accelerate past the 2,500-3,000rpm mark and there is a marked increase in noise levels inside the cabin. It is a bit rough for a 4-cylinder unit. The gearbox does a good job with easy shifts and evenly spaced ratios. There is a lot of midrange torque that can be put to use. It was even better when I was shifting gears using the steering mounted paddles. However, it may not be the most frugal four-pot unit there is. During my test drive, the mileage I managed ranged between 7-8 kmpl.

There are four drive modes to choose from. In Comfort and Eco modes, the XC40 T4 feels like it is built for the city-unhurried and focused on keeping things simple under the bonnet. There is enough power to let you cruise through free-flowing traffic and to easily make that quick overtake when the need arises. Shift to Sport mode and the engine immediately gets into a boil and throttle response is heightened. There is no active suspen-



The XC40 T4 R Design gets more equipment, and a new petrol powertrain, in addition to a better safety kit

sion in the play and, unlike the T5 variant available in European markets, this one doesn't get all-wheel drive either.

Bottom Line

The new XC40 T4 R Design's ride quality is good on clean tarmac, but over broken, uneven tarmac it does feel like the suspension is a bit over rigid and so rear seat occupants would get to feel more of the road's quality. Handling is good though, with a steering that stiffens up at highway speeds and is a breeze to use in city. As expected, Volvo hasn't compromised on safety and the XC40 T4 R Design gets adaptive cruise control, steering assist, roll stability control and seven airbags. Priced at ₹39.9 lakh (ex-showroom), this is still the most value for money compact luxury SUV.



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