

SUV

One of the latest additions to the Volvo range of SUVs is the XC60. Is it fun, fast and furious? *EST* took it on a road trip to Scotland before winter had yielded to spring to see how it measured up.

By **Tim Fryer**

With a spring in its step

Model tested:

Volvo
XC60 D5
Powerpulse AWD
Inscription

Cost

£45,650
£37k-£59k
across complete
range

Lovely
to drive
Plenty of tech
Comfort



38mpg
Average fuel
consumption during
test across all
conditions

Fifth
seat less
comfortable



Boot
not huge



DRIVING NEEDS TO be enjoyable and functional. It doesn't need to be manic and macho, which is why I am not sure a motoring journalist is always the best person to test-drive a car. But perhaps an ordinary driver, like me, is. I appreciate a bit of acceleration, but I'm not going to go wild over a top speed that is double the legal limit, as I want to keep hold of my driving licence.

Accordingly, when I took delivery of the Volvo XC60 D5, I immediately selected the Comfort setting. It subsequently turned out that the Eco setting only took a minor shine off the performance, but also didn't make it substantially more economical. More on the other two modes later.

The task set out before this car was to take a family of four from the south of England up to the highlands of Scotland and do a bit of a road trip while in the land of heather and rain. The heather isn't relevant. The rain is, as indeed was the snow, as it added a further dimension to the driving experience.

The first thing to note is that the instruction manual is held digitally behind the ample (nine-inch) control screen and it will not open while the car is being driven to prevent driver distraction. As a consequence, useful information was not at hand when I needed it and I kept forgetting to look it up afterwards, although by contrast this did serve to prove what an instinctive driving machine this Volvo is.

Comfort is king

As a 50-something man with a dodgy back, a couple of thousand miles in a car can be torturous, but there was no need to fret on this score. Having played around with sorting out the ups, downs and angles of the seat position – and using the electric lumbar support to further weld me into the perfect driving position – all I needed was some popcorn and a Coke and I would have happily sat there all night just listening to the radio.

For a while a fifth body joined the travelling party and the middle seat at the back was clearly less comfortable than any of the others. It wouldn't be ideal if it was going to be for a long journey or where a family of five is the everyday payload.

In this age of digital communication it is good to be able to talk, and almost every instruction that can be inputted through the touchscreen can also

be given verbally. The voice recognition was pretty good for most things, but tripped up over the radio stations a few times for some reason. Being able to bark out commands to the car felt like I was re-establishing the proper order of things; modern cars can be very prescriptive.

There are four drive modes: Eco, Comfort, Off-road and Dynamic. As said before, the first of these was fairly indistinguishable from the second. The plan was to test the off-road capabilities on the forestry tracks that went over the hills from Inveraray to Loch Awe. However, despite some significant potholes, the forestry trucks that charge up and down these roads appear to have worn it down into a less challenging surface than anticipated. The Off-road setting therefore revved purposefully, but didn't deliver enough speed to make progress and I didn't have the courage to try proper off-roading. I was conscious that this still wasn't my car!

That road had some pretty appreciable inclines and was covered in a muddy film, so when the logging lorries appeared round a blind corner at speed – they clearly are not used to anything else using their roads – then the value of having four-wheel drive (4WD) was apparent. The responsiveness and road-holding in these difficult conditions was excellent, as well as both a comfort and a relief. At other times in our journey we encountered snow, ice and excessive surface water that the Volvo's 4WD ploughed through without slip or deviation.

The fourth driving mode was Dynamic, which it noticeably was. The model I had was the XC60 D5 Powerplus AWD Inscription, which creates 235hp resulting in acceleration from 0-60mph in 7.2 seconds. Again, for those who fail to relate numbers to meaningful reality, this is nippy. I suspect it was measured in the Dynamic mode as this car is nippy enough in my spiritual home of Comfort mode, but it is decidedly sporty in Dynamic. And more fun.

However, fuel economy suffers. The Volvo spec sheets claim fuel consumption in mixed driving conditions as 5.8 litres per 100km, which is about 41mpg in old money. Given that the perceived wisdom is that you take manufacturers' figures, divide by two and add on the number you first thought of, this was refreshingly honest. In Comfort mode we were getting about 38mpg, which rose to 39-40 in

Eco mode. However in Dynamic mode it dropped to 31mpg, so the extra bit of fun comes at a cost. I was too busy looking out for logging lorries while driving in Off-Road mode, but I suspect it wasn't great, nor would it be expected to be.

Verdicts from the passenger seats were all very favourable, but the real winner is the driver. Increasingly more mid- to upper-range cars have such options as Heads-Up Display (essential information like speed reflected on the windscreen), adaptive cruise control and lane-keeping control.

For those wondering what it would be like to 'drive' an autonomous car, features of Volvo's IntelliSafe system give an interesting first step. The lane migration keeps you from wandering from one lane to another or driving off the side of the road, tweaking the steering to keep you on track. The adaptive cruise control keeps a steady distance between you and the car in front. For those not acquainted with such features it may sound a relaxing way to drive. It isn't. At least not to start with.

Both these features are brilliant, but it is a huge leap of faith to rely on them and indeed it is not the intention that they should replace the driver's full attention. In fact, the lane migration feature works up to a point. After bouncing from one side of the lane to another a few times the car will slowly automatically decelerate as the assumption is that the driver has fallen asleep or some other misfortune has occurred.

The adaptive cruise control I used a lot on the motorways: it's a great device. Mind you, it didn't pass the 'chevron test', those motorways that endeavour to teach us safe driving by telling us to keep two chevrons apart. There is such a stretch on the M6 on the way to Scotland, but at odds with what the Volvo regarded as safe. It tended more towards a spacing of one chevron between cars at normal motorway speeds, which perhaps is putting too much faith in its braking capabilities when this is switched on. Using both features, especially for the novice, probably heightens rather than diminishes attention to the road.

The bottom line is, I quite fancy one of these although I may have to wait for a year or two until some affordable secondhand units come on the market. *

A full version of this review can be read at: bit.ly/eandt-volvo