



ROAD TEST

# Volvo V70 Cross Country

A Volvo wagon for the wannabe Marlboro man.

BY ANDRÉ IDZIKOWSKI

**Y**ou probably won't be bowled over to hear there's an ongoing boom in SUV sales. A seemingly endless line of them continues to roll out of showrooms with no end in sight, despite recent extortion at the petrol pump. This phenomenon has provoked warm and moist feelings in the boardrooms of those manufacturers who have been in a position to supply this demand—after all, sport-utility vehicles generate higher profits than passenger cars—and wistful watching from the sidelines by manufacturers who lack sport-utilities of their own.

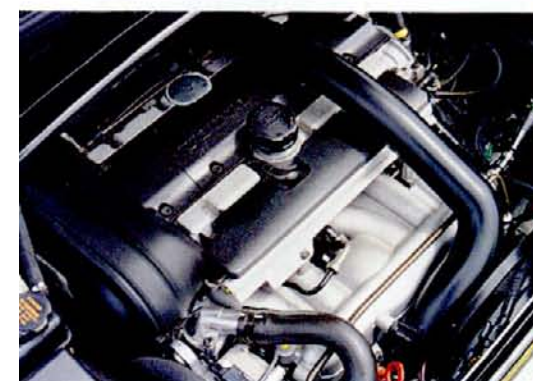
You may also have noticed that the automakers who have no SUVs for sale have subdivided into two distinct groups—those who have been willing to step up to the enormous development costs associ-

ated with producing an all-new vehicle, such as the BMW X5; and those who have made do by raising the ride height of their station wagons, bolting on butch body cladding, adding all-wheel drive, and dreaming up a marketing program that uses the words "active lifestyle" at least 20 times per press release.

Subaru pioneered the realm of SUV-like wagons with its Outback. Volvo's V70 XC (for "cross country") was a me-too latecomer, proving, once again, that no idea is too good not to imitate. Volvo introduced the XC version of the V70-series wagon in 1997 as a '98 model. Much to the delight and surprise of the marketing gurus, it quickly became a brisk seller, accounting for 45 percent of total V70 wagon sales in 1999. Hoping to continue

that sales success and build on it, Volvo decided not only to update the XC but also to make it look more like a "real" SUV and less like a wannabe. Does that sound like more body cladding? You bet.

Although the first-generation XC was only mildly different in appearance from its V70 siblings, this second-generation wagon gets a complete macho makeover. To give the new, more curvaceous sheet-metal that off-road bruiser look, the designers at Volvo decided to spruce it up royally with matte plastic cladding—everywhere. The nose of the XC, except for the chrome grille, is molded out of this scratch-resistant plastic, as is the rear bumper cover. There is a large air intake opening in the lower part of the front air dam that is accented underneath with what



## THE VERDICT

**Highs:** A Volvo with character, and it's not an SUV.

**Lows:** It's not an SUV, less-than-sporty handling, expensive when optioned out.

**The Verdict:** Volvo family values with attitude.



Only a chrome grille and a faux skid plate glitz up the contours of the XC's bulbous new nose.

looks like a titanium-hued skid plate. It's actually a plastic accent, although the XC does come standard with a credit-card-thin front skid plate you have to crawl under the car to see. The cladding continues around the front wheel arches, down along the lower part of the doors, and then around the back wheel arches into the rear bumper cover. It has an uneven texture to it, with small crevices like dried lake mud, and the cladding comes in dark brown or dark blue, depending on the car's paint color. According to the designers at Volvo, the dark-colored cladding not only protects the paint from being scratched while bush-whacking but also makes the XC look taller and more SUV-like.

The taller appearance of the XC isn't all smoke and mirrors. Its ground clearance is up an inch from the base vehicle's, to 8.2 inches. That matches the clearance of the Audi Allroad 2.7T Quattro and bests some truck-utes', such as the base Ford Explorer's (6.7 inches). The engineers at Volvo toyed with using an adjustable suspension system like the Audi's but decided it wasn't worth the extra cost and complexity. New, larger 215/65HR-16 tires and wheels necessitated a quarter-inch

## COUNTERPOINT

**U**nfortunately, I drove the turbocharged T5 wagon for a counterpoint in the July issue, which sure soured me for the ponderous Cross Country. The T5 was like no other station wagon I'd ever driven. Really fast, and really sharp-looking. And really expensive, but there you have it. The XC's exterior styling is pretty dumpy. The dark-brown, baseball-stitched leather seats are gorgeous, however; the pull-down cargo cage is nifty; and the rear headrests snap down easily when the seats are laid flat for cargo. But the XC is burdened with 50 fewer horses and 160 more pounds—not a good combination for speed and alacrity. The XC just can't hold a candle to its T5 sibling.

—Patti Maki

**L**ast weekend, I took my daughter to a carnival where the only available parking was on the grassy shoulder at the side of the road. Had we been driving a low-slung sports car, I might have hesitated parking with two wheels in the drainage ditch. But with the V70 XC, I had no such inhibitions. Nor did I

worry about gouging the underbody if I pulled into a parking spot and hit the curb with the front tires, or scraping the driveline if I assaulted a speed bump a bit faster than recommended. Although its higher ground clearance won't help me emulate Juan Montoya in the corners, for most driving, the XC provides most of the benefits of an SUV with few of the disadvantages.

—Csaba Csere

**I**f dressing up a wagon to look like a sport-ute and hooking up a four-wheel-drive system are what it takes to convince certain folks that wagons are indeed as useful as trucks, I'm all for it. The formula clearly works, as Subaru's successful Outback has proved, and even Audi has joined in with the Allroad. Volvo's new Cross Country makes a strong case for itself in that it has the benefits of four-wheel drive yet retains the silky ride and refinement of two-wheeler Volvo wagons. Even living in Michigan, I can't remember the last time a front-drive car couldn't get me where I wanted to go; so for me, I'd enjoy the lighter and quicker T5.

—Larry Webster



increase in wheelbase to 108.8 inches and a 2.3-inch increase in the front track relative to cooking-grade V70s. Because of the increased track, the XC gets slightly wider front fenders with more flare to them. Now, with all these changes, you don't have to look at the badging on the XC, as you did on the previous edition, to tell it apart from the on-road V70s.

Inside, the most readily visible change from a "regular" V70 is in the back. The XC now comes standard with a new, and industry-first, three-part 40/20/40 split rear seat. Any combination of sections can be folded down, or the center section of the seatback can be unlatched and flipped over into an armrest. The center-seat cushion and seatback can be removed and replaced with a beverage cooler that plugs into a 12-volt outlet in the rear cargo compartment, or replaced with a specially designed storage bag.

Up front, there's a titanium-colored

grab handle integrated into and running along the top right-side edge of the center console. A front passenger can brace himself with it should the going get rough. Otherwise, the interior is standard V70 fare, plain-looking but quite functional.

One thing that made us look twice and gulp hard was the price—\$42,867 as tested. Base price on the XC is \$35,475. Big-ticket extras added to make ours a go-anywhere, do-anything V70 were the \$2500 navigation system, a \$1425 Leather and Versatility package (leather interior with baseball-glove stitching unique to the XC, a cargo protection grate that folds down from the ceiling, a cargo security cover, and a grocery-bag holder), the \$1200 power sunroof, a \$1000 premium sound system with a dashboard CD changer capable of accepting four discs, and a \$635 Security package that fortifies the Volvo with laminated door windows and motion detectors. For another \$400,

we got the Cold Weather package (heated front seats, headlamp wipers and washers). Added up, that's more than a similarly equipped Lexus RX300 or M-B ML320 would cost.

It's still a lot more fun to drive this wagon than most, if not all, sport-utes. Propelling the XC is Volvo's 2.4-liter five-cylinder light-pressure turbo engine that puts out 197 horsepower. Our test car zipped from 0 to 60 mph in a respectable 8.6 seconds, or 0.9 second slower than the more powerful Allroad but 1.2 seconds faster than an ML320. Connected to the engine is Volvo's Geartronic five-speed automatic transmission, which allows you to shift gears manually. The tranny shifts seamlessly, and the slap shifter comes in handy off-road descending slippery slopes, where you can switch to a lower gear and take advantage of engine braking to slow you down.

The XC uses the same all-wheel-drive system that the previous generation did. On dry pavement, 95 percent of the engine's power goes to the front wheels. A viscous clutch allows any or all of that power to be transferred to the rear wheels in slippery conditions. Volvo supplements all-wheel drive with TRACS, which applies the brakes in situations when both wheels on one side of the car begin to slip, thereby shifting power to the other side.

On unimproved roads and dirt tracks, the new XC rides and handles better than the last-generation car, due to its increased ground clearance and Pirelli Scorpion

tires. On dry roads, the knobby tires make for less than razor-sharp handling, although the XC managed 0.77 g on the skidpad. That's 0.03 less than the sportier V70 T5 and 0.02 g behind the Audi Allroad, but it's better than most SUVs can produce.

Like its T5 sibling, the XC comes packed with safety features: Volvo's whiplash protection system, side-impact airbags, and inflatable curtains on the side-door windows. Versatility is another XC virtue, and Volvo offers various bolt-ons for the roof rails, such as bicycle and snow-board carriers. There's also a third-row kid-seat option or a picnic table for two that bolts onto the rear tailgate latch.

In spite of all the rough and rugged posturing, the XC remains a Volvo at heart, and as advertised, it's safe, practical, and comfortable. Given a choice between this wannabe and an SUV, it's no contest—we'd pick the XC. But given a choice of wagons, we'd opt for its sportier stablemate, the T5. Yes, the T is for a full-blown, 11.7-psi turbocharger.



**VOLVO V70 CROSS COUNTRY**  
Vehicle type: front-engine, 4-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 5-door wagon

Price as tested: \$42,867

**Price and option breakdown:** base Volvo V70 Cross Country (includes \$575 freight), \$35,475; navigation system, \$2500; Leather and Versatility package (includes leather upholstery, simulated wood trim, cargo grate, cargo cover, and grocery-bag holder), \$1425; power sunroof, \$1200; in-dash 4-disc CD changer, \$1000; Security package (includes body-movement and interior-motion sensors), \$635; Cold Weather package (consists of heated front seats and headlamp washers and wipers), \$400; luxury tax on options, \$232

**Major standard accessories:** power steering, windows, driver's seat, and locks; A/C; cruise control; tilting and telescoping steering wheel; rear defroster and wiper

**Sound system:** Volvo HU 803 AM/FM-stereo radio/cassette/CD changer, 8 speakers

#### ENGINE

Type .....turbocharged and intercooled 5-in-line, aluminum block and head  
Bore x stroke .....3.27 x 3.54 in, 83.0 x 90.0mm  
Displacement .....149 cu in, 2435cc  
Compression ratio .....9.0:1  
Engine-control system ..... Bosch Motronic ME7.0 with port fuel injection  
Emissions controls .....3-way catalytic converter, feedback air-fuel-ratio control  
Turbocharger ..... Mitsubishi  
Waste gate ..... integral  
Maximum boost pressure .....6.5 psi  
Valve gear ..... belt-driven double overhead cams, 4 valves per cylinder, variable exhaust-valve timing

Power (SAE net) .....197 bhp @ 6000 rpm  
Torque (SAE net) .....210 lb-ft @ 1800 rpm  
Redline .....6100 rpm

#### DRIVETRAIN

Transmission .....5-speed automatic with lockup torque converter  
Final-drive ratio .....2.65:1, electronic limited slip  
Gear Ratio Mph/1000 rpm Max. test speed  
I 4.77 6.1 37 mph (6100 rpm)  
II 2.99 9.8 60 mph (6100 rpm)  
III 1.96 14.9 91 mph (6100 rpm)  
IV 1.32 22.2 118 mph (5300 rpm)  
V 1.02 28.7 118 mph (4100 rpm)

#### DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase .....108.8 in  
Track, F/R .....63.4/60.9 in

Length .....186.3 in  
Width .....73.2 in  
Height .....61.5 in  
Frontal area .....25.3 sq ft  
Ground clearance .....8.2 in  
Curb weight .....3884 lb  
Weight distribution, F/R .....53.7/46.3%  
Fuel capacity .....18.5 gal  
Oil capacity .....6.1 qt  
Water capacity .....12.9 qt

#### CHASSIS/BODY

Type .....unit construction with 2 rubber-isolated subframes  
Body material .....welded steel stampings

#### INTERIOR

SAE volume, front seat .....54 cu ft  
rear seat .....45 cu ft  
luggage space, seats up/folded .....38/72 cu ft  
Practical cargo room, length of pipe .....130.5 in  
largest sheet of plywood .....44.5 x 65.5 in  
no. of 10 x 10 x 16-in boxes, seats up/folded .....17/26  
Front seats ..... bucket  
Seat adjustments ..... fore and aft, seatback angle, front height, rear height, lumbar support  
Restraint systems, front ..... manual 3-point belts; driver and passenger front, side, and curtain airbags  
rear ..... manual 3-point belts, side and curtain airbags  
General comfort ..... poor fair **good** excellent  
Fore-and-aft support ..... poor fair **good** excellent  
Lateral support ..... poor fair **good** excellent

#### SUSPENSION

F: .....ind, strut located by a control arm, coil springs, anti-roll bar  
R: .....ind; 1 control arm, 1 trailing link, 1 lateral link, and 1 toe-control link per side; coil springs; anti-roll bar

#### STEERING

Type .....rack-and-pinion, power-assisted  
Turns lock-to-lock .....2.8  
Turning circle curb-to-curb .....39.0 ft

#### BRAKES

F: .....11.3 x 1.0-in vented disc  
R: .....11.3 x 0.4-in disc  
Power assist ..... vacuum with anti-lock control

#### WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size .....7.0 x 16 in  
Wheel type ..... cast aluminum  
Tires .....Pirelli Scorpion S/T, 215/65HR-16  
Test inflation pressures, F/R .....29/29 psi



### C/D TEST RESULTS

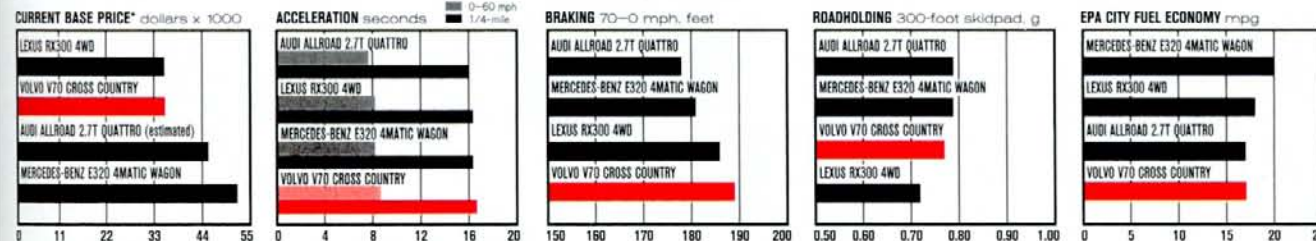
ACCELERATION	Seconds
Zero to 30 mph.....	2.7
40 mph.....	4.3
50 mph.....	6.2
60 mph.....	8.6
70 mph.....	11.7
80 mph.....	15.1
90 mph.....	19.7
100 mph.....	26.2
110 mph.....	34.1
Street start, 5-60 mph.....	9.5
Top-gear acceleration, 30-50 mph.....	4.4
50-70 mph.....	6.7
Standing 1/4-mile.....	16.6 sec @ 83 mph
Top speed (governor limited).....	118 mph

BRAKING	
70-0 mph @ impending lockup.....	189 ft
Fade.....	none <b>light</b> moderate heavy

HANDLING	
Roadholding, 300-ft-dia skidpad.....	0.77 g
Understeer.....	minimal <b>moderate</b> excessive

FUEL ECONOMY	
EPA city driving.....	17 mpg
EPA highway driving.....	22 mpg
C/D-observed fuel economy.....	<b>20 mpg</b>

INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL	
Idle.....	42 dBA
Full-throttle acceleration.....	71 dBA
70-mph cruising.....	69 dBA
70-mph coasting.....	69 dBA



\*Base price includes freight, any performance options, and all applicable luxury and gas-guzzler taxes.

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