Road Beat: Volvo V90 AWD, better than the sedan



The Volvo V90 AWD is a high performing car with good looks. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

It’s not often a station wagon will out do the sedan, especially one as competent as the Volvo S90, but in this case the AWD Volvo V90 is a winner. While the S90 is stunning, the V90 adds a dash more sport and its proportions are smoother and more rakish, giving the V90 an edge in the appearance department.

I never thought I would say this, but Volvo now makes some of the best-looking cars in the business and the V90 takes the cake, it is beautiful.

Built on the S90 chassis, the new V90 is an inch shorter at 194 inches, but an inch taller at 58 inches. They share wheelbase and width at 116 and 74 inches, respectively, making the V90 only slightly bigger than a mid-size, but with a full size, roomy interior. And what an interior it is. More on that later, but other manufacturers could take a lesson here.

Under the V90's bonnet lies an anomaly of an engine, similar to the aircraft radial engines of World War II, which had mechanical supercharging and turbo charging which gave our aircraft high performance at any altitude. Volvo has introduced the same principal. They have downsized their engines to 2.0L with all the bells and whistles (DOHC, 16 valves, variable timing, direct injection, etc.) to produce an astounding 320 hp at a low 5,700 rpm (up 4 hp over the S90) and the same 295 pounds of twist from about 2,200-5,400 rpm. Low speed engine coarseness seemed less and unobtrusive. Power first gets multiplied by Volvo's trick eight speeder torque converter cog swapper and then sent to all four wheels on an "as needed basis."



Specifications
Price
$56,300 to $64,640
Engine (AWD)
2.0LDOHC 16valave direct injected, turbo and supercharged inline four cylinder

320 hp @ 5,700rpm
295 lb.-ft. of torque @ 2,200-5,400 rpm

Transmission

Eight-speed torque automatic

Configuration

Transverse front engine/front wheel drive/all wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 115.8 inches
Length 194.3 inches
Width 74.0 inches
Height 58.0 inches
Ground clearance 6.0 inches
Track (f/r 19-inch wheel) 63.7/63.9 inches
Weight 4,492 pounds
Furl capacity 15.9 gallons
Cargo volume 69 cubic feet
Trailer capacity 4,600 pounds
Wheels 19 inch alloys
Tires 255/50X19
Turning circle (wall to wall) 38.0 feet
Co-efficient of drag 0.30

Performance

0-60 mph 5.77 seconds
50-70 mph 2.96 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 4.39 seconds
Top speed 130 mph governor limited

Fuel Economy

EPA rated at 22/30/25 mpg city/highway/combined.

Expect 25-26 mpg in mixed driving and 34-35 mpg on a level highway at legal speeds.

Volvo lists the 0-62 mph time at 6.1 seconds and my average to 60 mph was 5.77 seconds, perhaps a bit quicker than the Volvo guys. Passing was also equally as quick with a 50-70 mph level pass just taking 2.96 seconds and the same run up a 6-7 percent grade only slowed the V90 to 4.39 seconds. This is world class performance producing virtually identical numbers as S90. And with both a mechanical supercharger plus a turbo charger, there is absolutely no turbo lag. Zero, zip, nada.

On the flip side is the remarkable fuel economy returned by this near full-size 4,492-pound ride. EPA says it should achieve 22/30/25 mpg city/highway/combined. On a level highway with the cruise set at 70 mph the two-way average was 34.6 mpg. Overall the V90 averaged 25.8 mpg with almost no highway and plenty of suburban driving and it was aggressive. On the round trip to Carson City over the Sierra on Highway 50 the V90 average a decent 26.3 mpg. It certainly isn’t a gas hog, if anything considering its world class performance, it’s downright miserly.

Volvos in general have a slightly disconnected feel, perhaps it’s the “fly by wire” systems, where everything is electronic. In aircraft, it used to be that all controls were mechanically connected giving pilots a direct, actual feel as to what the controls were doing. It’s what made the P-51, T-28 or even a Beechcraft Bonanza such a pleasure to fly doing exactly what your inputs asked with perfect feedback and feel, ask any lucky pilot who flew one. Now everything is electronic, but the V90 has lots of cornering power and with its state of the art suspenders, wide 64-inch track, big 235/50 meats on 19-inch wheels and reasonably quick steering of 3.0 turns lock to lock it can dance in the twisties with

the best sporting sedans. However, when pushed hard, the steering is slow to unwind.

Ride quality is firm but supple, the bigger the bump the better it does. On smooth roads, it is very smooth and it soaks up all minor road imperfections. It is quiet with no wind, engine, road or tire noise.

Safety is Volvo's forte, and the V90 is no exception, with automatic emergency braking, lane departure and every acronym in the book, plus massive four-wheel ventilated discs almost 14 inches in diameter in front. Volvo is a veritable buffet of safety. LED headlights are fabulous and they have standard AFS which follows steering inputs.

Perhaps the piece de résistance of this Volvo V90 is the sumptuous, but sporty interior. Quality is absolutely top of the line, with the softest and thickest leathers done is a warm natural tan. And there is plenty of it as it covers the seats and the center console. The rest of the materials are also first rate on the dash and door panels. Seats are sublime and rear seating is huge and also sublime.

So, what could be wrong? Perhaps in an attempt to mimic the Tesla big center info screen, Volvo does almost everything by touch screen and while it seemed better in the S90, it appeared more difficult to use in the V90. Sometimes it doesn't take a finger touch, whatever it is it does not compliment the vehicle. Even voice input is more difficult. Changes need to be made to make this system more user friendly especially to those who are semi-computer illiterate. As a safety factor, operating the touch screen is also distracting.

Pricing starts for this V90 T6 AWD at a reasonable $56,300 plus $995 for the luxury liner from Gothenburg, Sweden. Geely of China may own Volvo, but it is still Swedish, with most parts sourced there except for the tranny which is imported from Japan. Options ran the total to $64,640 with the most

noteworthy being the $3,200 stupendous Bowers and Wilkens sound system. It is meant to listen to music, especially rock as no matter the volume there is no distortion. And you can set to mimic yourself standing in front of a live stage. Amazing. Fix the sound system operation and the entire Volvo will be amazing. My preference leans toward the V90, same exhilarating performance, equal handling, perhaps better looks and certainly more utility. And nobody has better leather, not even a Bentley.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.