

# road test

## 2004.5 Volvo S40 Program #2331



2004.5 Volvo S40

**T**he Volvo S40 is what we in the automotive press refer to as a "sweet little car". Tight, nimble, a compact sedan that is one of Volvo's most enjoyable cars to drive, while also being its most affordable. Of course, even a terrific little car like the S40 has to change with the times. So is the all new S40 as good as the old one? Or is it even better?

Well, after a couple of weeks in a new 2004.5 Volvo S40, we have to say there's no doubt about it. Just when we thought Volvo had found the low-budget gem of their high-end fleet, they managed to make it shine a lot brighter.

Style wise, the new S40 comes off as a slightly squat version of the larger S60. The modern Peter Holbry lines give it an athletic build its predecessor lacked. Though nearly 2 inches shorter than last year, the fresh S40 is 2 inches wider and taller. The 103.9-inch wheelbase is also 3 inches longer with wider front and rear tracks.

The corporate chassis is all new. Shared with the Mazda3 and European Ford Focus, it's torsionally two-thirds stiffer than before. Riding on standard 16-inch alloys, or these 17-inchers from the Sport Package, the S40's modern but sensible take spills over to every aspect of the Swedish treat.

Inside, the expanded wheelbase provides a spacious and airy interior, with a high fashion look we're not used to in a Volvo. The front seats are wide, firm, and like all Volvos, have excellent support. The steering wheel tilts and telescopes. Gauge appearance is clean and direct, and navigation system is optional. But your eyes quickly fall on the chic show car center stack, a curvaceous panel that flows off the dash and down towards the floor. The uncluttered form houses the audio, telephone and climate controls and a storage bin behind its slender Scandinavian

<b>Engine</b>	<b>2.5-liter twin-5</b>
<b>Horsepower</b>	<b>218</b>
<b>Torque</b>	<b>236 lb ft</b>
<b>0-60 mph</b>	<b>6.9 seconds</b>
<b>1/4 mile</b>	<b>15.2 seconds mph</b>
<b>60-0 mph</b>	<b>119 feet</b>
<b>EPA Mileage</b>	<b>25 mpg city</b>
	<b>31 mpg highway</b>
<b>MotorWeek's mileage loop</b>	<b>27 mpg mixed city/highway</b>

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Progressive safety features, as expected, are plentiful with high and low speed front crumple zones and an advanced side impact structure. Side and curtain airbags and anti-whiplash seats also help insure that this is no glass house.

With 1.7-inches more leg room, the rear seat is now sufficient for adults. Combine the split fold seats with the folding front passenger seat, and the S40 can cart longer items than some SUVs. The trunk itself provides a healthy 14.3 cubic feet of luggage space.



Moving all on board the base S40 2.4i model is a 1.8-liter dual-overhead-cam in-line 5. It outputs 168 horsepower and 170 pound-feet of torque. Our T5 model is powered by a 2.5-liter twin-cam I-5 pushing out 218 horsepower and 236 pound-feet of torque. Initially both will be offered with a 5-speed automatic transmission with winter mode and traction control. That will be followed by manuals, a 5-speed

in the 2.4i, and a 6-speed in the T5 that we got to sample.

At the track, with our manual, the S40 reached 60 in only 6.9 seconds. A very sporting result over a second and a half faster than the first generation car. The quarter mile ends in a spirit 15.2 seconds at 97 miles-per-hour. Off idle, things happen a bit slowly as the turbo spins up, from 3000 rpm on, the S40 pulls like a freight train. When pressed, the engine produces familiar whirring Volvo turbo sounds. It's like Puccini to us, a kind of mechanical opera on the track.

What's a little less musical is the light and near absent feel of the on-off clutch. Soft, too, is the brake pedal. But in our panic tests, stops from 60 averaged a short 119 feet. ABS with electronic brake force distribution properly controls the vented front, solid rear discs.

Handling, with or without optional Electronic Stability Control, is a big improvement over the S40. The strut front, rear multi-link suspension in Sport Package trim is European taut without being stiff. Body roll is modest, and while the electro-hydraulic steering lacks road feel, it does have a good weight to it. Like the powertrains, there is a much sportier, nimble feel with a lot of front plow, much like a good rear-wheel drive European sport sedan. But the price for that prowess is a car that transitions to oversteer quicker than most front drive sedans.

More typical daily driving reveals a comfortable highway ride. And even over broken, frost-heaved pavement, the S40 displayed above average interior noise control. And though all-wheel drive will be offered before next winter, the new S40 already performs well under slippery conditions.

EPA economy estimates for the manual S40 T5 figure in at 25 city and 31 highway. In mixed driving, expect about 27 miles per gallon.

Pricing for the S40 begins at \$23,675 for the manual 2.4i, the automatic T5 at \$27,675. This summer, Volvo will add a companion front and all-wheel drive wagon series, the 2005 V50.

But for right now, we think the new Volvo S40 is just fine. It's a safe, kid-friendly compact sedan that humors adults with value, comfort and genuine drivability. Indeed, the 2004.5 S-40 is a "Swede" little deal!

