

First Drive: 2008 Volvo V70/XC70 - Previews

The emperor's new clothes.

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October 2007



This isn't the first time Volvo has produced an all-new car that looks just like its predecessor. Clearly, the Swedish purveyor of sensible sedans and wagons is afraid of alienating its clientele.

Volvo describes the '08 V70 as "the ultimate wagon," which, if our memory serves, is what it said about the last one. It is true that the folks who buy Volvos are supposedly not terribly sensitive to fashion. And there are only so many ways to style a sedan-based wagon, if, as Volvo insists, it has to have class-leading load space and room to accommodate a household washing machine without folding the

seats.

The designers did their best to sell up the identifiers of the new V70—the revised grille, new light units, black pillars, and the sculpted liftgate—but to no avail: See one coming up behind, and it's hard to know if it's a new V70 or the previous model. It's also hard to know how much improvement there has been from one to the other, despite a new front- and four-wheel-drive architecture shared with the S80 sedan.



This is the first V70 to have a six-cylinder engine. The 235-hp, 3.2-liter inline-six is the same as the S80's, but the 282-hp, 3.0-liter turbocharged version makes its debut in the wagon. The V70 engines are mounted transversely and coupled with the compact Aisin-Warner six-speed automatic transmission that Volvo calls Geartronic. It's neither as smooth nor as responsive as the ZF six-speed used by most of Volvo's rivals.

The naturally aspirated 3.2-liter is a sweet engine but quite a bit slower than the turbo (0 to 62 mph in 8.4 seconds versus 7.2). The more powerful engine, restricted to the T6

model, comes only with all-wheel drive, using a Haldex clutch pack to apportion torque front and rear.

The V70 inherits the chassis and safety systems introduced with the S80—adaptive damping with three positions, selectable steering effort (low, medium, and high), radar-based collision warning, and blind-spot warning. Volvo leaves you to decide on the best steering and suspension setup, but no combination is entirely satisfactory. The result is that the V70, like the S80, lacks a character of its own.



Functionally, it is fine. A bigger car

than its predecessor, the V70 has 2.4 inches added to the wheelbase and 4.5 inches to overall length, making more legroom front and rear. The S80-like cabin has a logical layout and pleasing furnishings, and the load bay can be organized with a variety of hooks and dividers, including a slide-out floor and bicycle rack.

As before, there's an XC70 version that is virtually identical mechanically to the V70, even if it looks more rugged and macho. All versions of the XC70 have four-wheel drive, and the ground clearance is raised to 8.3 inches. Volvo's research shows that XC70s are more often used off-road than the XC90 SUV, which is why the excellent hill-descent control is a standard feature. The XC70 went on sale in September; we expect the V70 just after the first of the year, but there are no plans for a hot-rod R version.

VEHICLE TYPE: front-engine, front- or 4-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 5-door wagon

ESTIMATED BASE PRICE: \$33,000

ENGINES: DOHC 24-valve 3.2-liter inline-6, 235 hp, 236 lb-ft; turbocharged and intercooled DOHC 24-valve 3.0-liter inline-6, 282 hp, 295 lb-ft

TRANSMISSION: 6-speed automatic with manumatic shifting

DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase: 110.9 in

Length: 189.9 in

Width: 73.3 in

Height: 60.9 in

Curb weight: 4200 lb

PERFORMANCE (MFR'S EST):

Zero to 62 mph: 7.2–8.4 sec

Top speed (governor limited): 130 mph

PROJECTED FUEL ECONOMY (C/D EST):

EPA city driving: 17–19 mpg

EPA highway driving: 25–27 mpg







