



## **The Volvo Everything Machine**

**By Roger Witherspoon**

It looks like a station wagon, but it's bigger than most of the cars in that category. Its rear is rounded; reminiscent of the original, popular Ford Taurus wagon of the early 1990s, but its aggressive grill is decidedly not part of a retro look. It has a skid pad and is nine inches off of the ground, as if it could be taken off-road and run through a trout stream, though it certainly is not a Jeep and won't be found in the deep woods.

It looks something like an SUV, but it is smaller than most of the cars in that category.

It is about the size of a compact Honda CRV, and its windows are shaped about the same way. It rides higher off the road than most cars, but it is certainly closer to the ground than a Ford Escape or a Nissan Murano, though its windows and styling resemble a smaller version of that Japanese crossover.

In Volvo's view, the new XC-60 is neither SUV nor station wagon. They call it a different kind of crossover, providing a little bit more than a standard station wagon – a breed which has lost popularity in the era of large and small SUVs – and a little bit less than the bulky SUVs which have lately come to dominate the American roadway. And as with many man-made hybrids, the XC-60 has some of the strengths and weaknesses of each of those predecessor vehicles.

The XC-60 certainly handles like a car and pickup is like a sporty sedan. There is no swayback like you would find in a typical, rear-heavy station wagon. If you close your eyes, the ride could be that of a typical family sedan. The turbocharged V-6 engine provides a lot of pickup for this mixed breed car. If you hit the accelerator the XC-60 actually jumps forward, though its 0-60 speed is just a respectable 7 seconds. And its top speed is 130 – the same category as the Lincoln MKZ – both of which cost \$42,000.

Inside this Volvo there is less room than one would find in the small SUVs, but it feels wider, higher, and more comfortable than the standard car or station wagon. And, with all wheel drive, traction and stability controls, it certainly handles better.

Inside this everything car the design is eclectic Scandinavian, with two thirds of the front dash slanted towards the driver, rather than creating two, nearly equal, cabin-like spaces for the driver and front passenger. This is intended to make it easier for the driver to focus on the car's instruments and controls and, for the most part, it works.

In terms of interior space, there is enough leg and head room in the XC-60 for a quartet of 6-footers, which is not necessarily the case with the average wagon, though the arm rest is not intended for actual use.

There is Volvo's trademark storage bin behind the center console and under the dash, which is perfect for purses though awkward for items you may want to actually use while driving, like electronic toll passes. And there is also a light in the base of the cup holders, so the driver does not have to fumble around in the dark if sipping tea while driving late at night.

This crossover has the appropriate amenities you might expect in a \$42,000 car – AM/FM/ Sirius satellite radio and an easy to use Bluetooth with a built-in numerical pad so you don't have to use the cell phone itself to dial numbers which are not already stored in the system. If the radio isn't enough, it also has connections for a USB port, iPod and MP3 player.

On the negative side, however, Volvo apparently has a lot of young designers who feel texting while driving is a valid pursuit and reading anything else is a waste of time. Hence it has the least helpful, most infuriating navigation system on the road. If you want to know how to get someplace, the lady in the computer will tell you. But if you want to know *where you are*, forget it. There are no details on the navigation map since the designers believe that people do not need such a clutter of information.

So if you are driving through a strange town you will see the bright blue triangle representing your car moving majestically through a grid of streets with no names. It might as well be the deep blue sea. There is also nothing intuitive about its operation, which is cumbersome.

In addition, the navigation system is primarily intended to be controlled by a hand held remote, which completes the texting while driving design. There are also partial controls on the steering wheel, but these are harder to use and limited in utility – driving you back too the remote. That is a strange twist for a car company with a well deserved reputation for a culture of safety and stability.

This is the same car which has introduced Volvo's new "City Safety" system, which is intended to eliminate or reduce the impact of minor crashes at speeds under 20 miles per hour, the area where most fender-benders occur. A radar system built behind the rear view mirror actually triggers the brakes if you are closing on the car in front of you or closing on a parked car. If the closing speed is 9 miles per hour or less, the car will actually stop. If the closing speed is 10 – 18 miles per hour, the brakes will cut that speed in half, thus minimizing the impact and maximizing the effectiveness of the bumper to reduce damages.

That is a thoughtful touch and another milestone en route to the day when cars are driven primarily by an always alert aggregate of computer networks controlled by

artificial intelligence. Today, however, these are intelligent aids – like smart navigation systems which provide options to route the driver around traffic jams or bad weather.

All things considered, this whatchamacallit of a car is an innovative addition in a crowded field of look alikes on wheels.



### **2010 Volvo XC-60**

<b>MSRP:</b>		<b>\$42,250</b>
<b>EPA Mileage:</b>	<b>16 MPG City</b>	<b>22 MPG Highway</b>
<b>As Tested Mileage:</b>		<b>15.6 MPG Mixed</b>

#### **Performance / Safety:**

<b>Top Speed:</b>	<b>130 MPH</b>
<b>0 – 60 MPH</b>	<b>7.1 Seconds</b>
<b>Towing Capacity:</b>	<b>3,300 Pounds</b>

3.0-Liter turbocharged DOHC V-6 engine producing 281 horsepower and 295 pound-feet of torque; 6-speed automatic transmission; all wheel drive; independent front and rear suspension; 4-wheel, power assisted disc brakes; anti-lock braking; 18-inch alloy wheels; rack & pinion steering; stability and traction control; City Safety system; trailer stability assist; dual chamber side impact airbags; front and rear fog lamps; headlight washers; backup camera.

#### **Interior / Comfort:**

AM/FM/ Sirius satellite HD radio; Bluetooth cell phone communication; Dynaudio Sound system with Dolby Surround Sound, 650-watt amplifier and 12 speakers; iPod, MP3 and USB-ports; tilt & telescope leather wrapped steering wheel with fingertip cruise, audio and Bluetooth controls; navigation system with real-time traffic updates; powered leather seats; panoramic sunroof; folding rear seats.