

Shifting Gears

[The Volvo C-30 Sport Machine](#)

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By Roger Witherspoon

It was raining on a Friday evening – a really bad time to be on the Taconic Parkway.

The scenic highway starts about 20 miles north of New York City and winds its way to the Massachusetts border. But about 40 miles north of the City limits it narrows from three lanes each way to two and the wide shoulders are abruptly replaced by imposing, encroaching concrete walls. The transformation from a scenic, six-lane, rustic highway to a narrow fast-moving blind alley is akin to forcing a wide, placid river through a steep canyon, transforming it in the process into unruly rapids. In this case, rapids with wheels and bumpers.

Traffic was comprised of an unholy mixture of tired motorists hurrying to get home after a week's work, including some who were afraid of water and didn't drive faster than a brisk walk; and a dangerous few had already started their weekend partying and shouldn't have been allowed behind the wheel.

The Dodge Charger getting ever larger in my rear view mirror was easy to spot. The driver was evidently one of the early party crowd, whose car moved faster than the other vehicles on the Taconic and he could not manage to color within the white dotted lines. His weaving was forcing one car after another to squeeze either dangerously close to the concrete wall or

the puny center divider while the Charger weaved obliviously past.

It did not take long to realize the fast moving drunk driver in the sports car was likely to hit me unless I found a way to make room. Unfortunately, that meant accelerating from about 50 miles an hour to about 80 and weaving past two cars in the left and right lanes while on a wet S-curve on an unlit, rain-soaked highway. That was not a normally sane option, but the idiot driver with the fine muscle car didn't leave much choice – he intended to barrel through whether I got out of his way or not.

So I downshifted the six-speed Volvo C-30 from 5th to 4th gear and hit the accelerator. The turbocharged, sport hatchback jumped forward in the right lane as if kicked and the speedometer spun past 80 as I zipped around the first car and then moved left into the fast lane in the middle of a sharp rightward curve. I noted gratefully that the Volvo's 18-inch wheels were hugging the road as tightly as a newly minted NBA player hugs his signing bonus, and there was daylight between me and madman in the Charger. So I slid the transmission into 5th gear, accelerated to 85, zipped past the second car while on the leftward curve and then passed the second car and moved into the slow lane. I had slowed back to 60 before the Charger caught up, straddling the middle line and rolled by, picking up both speed and attracting the attention of a State Trooper.

With or without drunks or rain on the road, the Volvo C-30 combines the safety characteristics long associated with this brand, with the performance characteristics associated with Detroit muscle cars and refined imported sports sedans from the likes of Mercedes or BMW. If you are single and like a performance car in the \$35,000 range, then that's the good news. On the other hand, the C-30 is not a family car. It's small, can feel cramped, has little in the way of storage space and, at that price, can face stiff competition from a variety of its bigger, badder competitors.



Volvo has long been associated with safe, reliable vehicles. But in recent years the company has sought to add pizzazz to the brand by offering more appealing designs. The C-30 is, essentially, a sleek, fast-moving cross between a sport hatchback and a small station wagon that seeks to act like a roadster. Outside, there is none of the safe boxy look long associated with Volvos. Instead, there is a long, aggressive snout with a low black grill just six inches off the pavement and running lights low and outside resembling the eyes of a pouncing cat. The roofline tapers to a sawed-off glass rear that's too short and sporty to be a hatchback and too

big for a standard rear view mirror. Thematically, the C-30 is its own niche.

Under that hood is a five-cylinder, turbocharged engine cranking out 227 horsepower and 236 pound-feet of torque – which is a lot for a small, lightweight car. The C-30 jumps from 0 – 60 miles per hour in 6.2 seconds, and can cost you your license at 149 miles per hour.

Inside, the C-30 offers a variety of amenities, but can appear Spartan and cramped. The dash is functional and the center console has Volvo's trademark design of a flat panel with a storage space behind it. That's an acquired taste, like Ikea furniture, because the space is small and awkward to get to, and if you push an item out the other side you will either have to forget about it or pull off the roadway and stop to retrieve it. That can be more than a little annoying at night or on long trips.



The car has a pop-up navigation system which is not intuitive and is designed for those who grew up playing computer games. It has a hand held joy stick to control the navigation functions, or a duplicate joystick built into the steering wheel column. Once you've climbed the learning curve, however, it is not difficult to operate and the joystick can be operated by a passenger, while the driver concentrates on the road. The navigation system is tied to the Sirius satellite system, with useful traffic and weather detour updates.

There is a central storage bin that is deep enough for 10 CDs and has the USB and MP3 connections, as well as a 15-volt power outlet. But it is situated too far back and too small to serve as a useful arm rest. The deep, bucket leather seats are a bit narrow for spreading old guys, but they are thickly padded, power adjusted, and can be heated.

The trunk area is about large enough for an overnight bag. The rear seats, which have enough leg room for a pair of average sized adults, can fold flat if needed and provide room for a reasonable luggage for two.

In the end, the C-30 is a sporty innovation from a company primarily known for well-made family cars. How it will fare in the rough and tumble competition for upwardly mobile young professionals remains to be seen.



2012 Volvo C30 T5

MSRP; **\$35,720**

EPA Mileage: **21 MPG City** **29 MPG Highway**

Performance / Safety:

Top Speed: **149 MPH**

0 – 60 MPH **6.2 Seconds**

2.5-Liter, 5-cylinder, turbocharged, DOHC alloy engine producing 227 horsepower and 236 pound-feet of torque; front wheel drive; 6-speed manual transmission; stability and traction control; Independent front suspension; multi-link rear suspension with coil springs; 4-wheel power disc brakes; anti-lock braking system; power assisted rack & pinion steering; 18-inch alloy wheels; front and rear fog lights; dual Xenon, bending headlights; curtain side impact head protection.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/FM/Sirius satellite radio; MP3 and USB ports; CD player; Bluetooth phone and audio; tilt and telescope, leather steering wheel with fingertip navigation, audio and cruise

controls; remote controlled, Sirius satellite navigation system with 6-inch color, pop-up screen; fold flat rear seats with 60/40 split; powered sunroof; powered, heated front seats; 10-speaker, 650-watt Dolby Pro Logic II Sound system.