

Fleet News On The Road

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First drive: the new Volvo S40



The all-new compact executive range, on sale from March 2004

Volvo aims upmarket with the all new S40

Volvo is positioning the new S40 to compete with the likes of Audi and BMW in the fiercely competitive compact executive sector. Simon Harris reports from the model's launch in southern Spain

THE fanfare surrounding the launch of the original Volvo S40 in 1996 was tempered slightly by some indifferent quality on early cars.

The shared project with Mitsubishi (the Carisma is built at the same plant in the Netherlands) which also spawned

the handsome V40 estate sold relatively well, but never really made a big impression in the upper-medium sector.

Although Volvo rooted out the quality issues within a couple of years, and the current S40 and V40 now seem excellent value, a change of strategy was needed for

the new model following a change of circumstances.

Volvo is now part of the Ford empire and a fully paid-up member of the Premier Automotive Group along with Aston Martin, Jaguar and Land Rover. The company sees itself as a genuine rival to the likes of

BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Audi and even its sister company, Jaguar.

This was first seen with the S60, launched in 2000, which heralded a dynamic new styling direction for Volvo, intended to appeal to a younger audience.

As the new S40 marks the end of Volvo's partnership with





Mitsubishi - the new car uses the C 1 platform engineered jointly by Volvo, Ford and Mazda - it is placed firmly in the compact executive sector, and Volvo believes any premium car under £20,000 is fair game for the S40.

The first fruit of the C1 platform was the Ford Focus C-MAX, while the Mazda3 will

also appear at about the same time as the new S40, with the V50 Sportswagon following shortly afterwards.

When the new S40 goes on sale in the UK in March, Volvo will offer a 170bhp five-cylinder 2.4-litre petrol engine, as well as a 220bhp 2.5-litre T5 and a 136bhp 2.0-litre common rail diesel, a

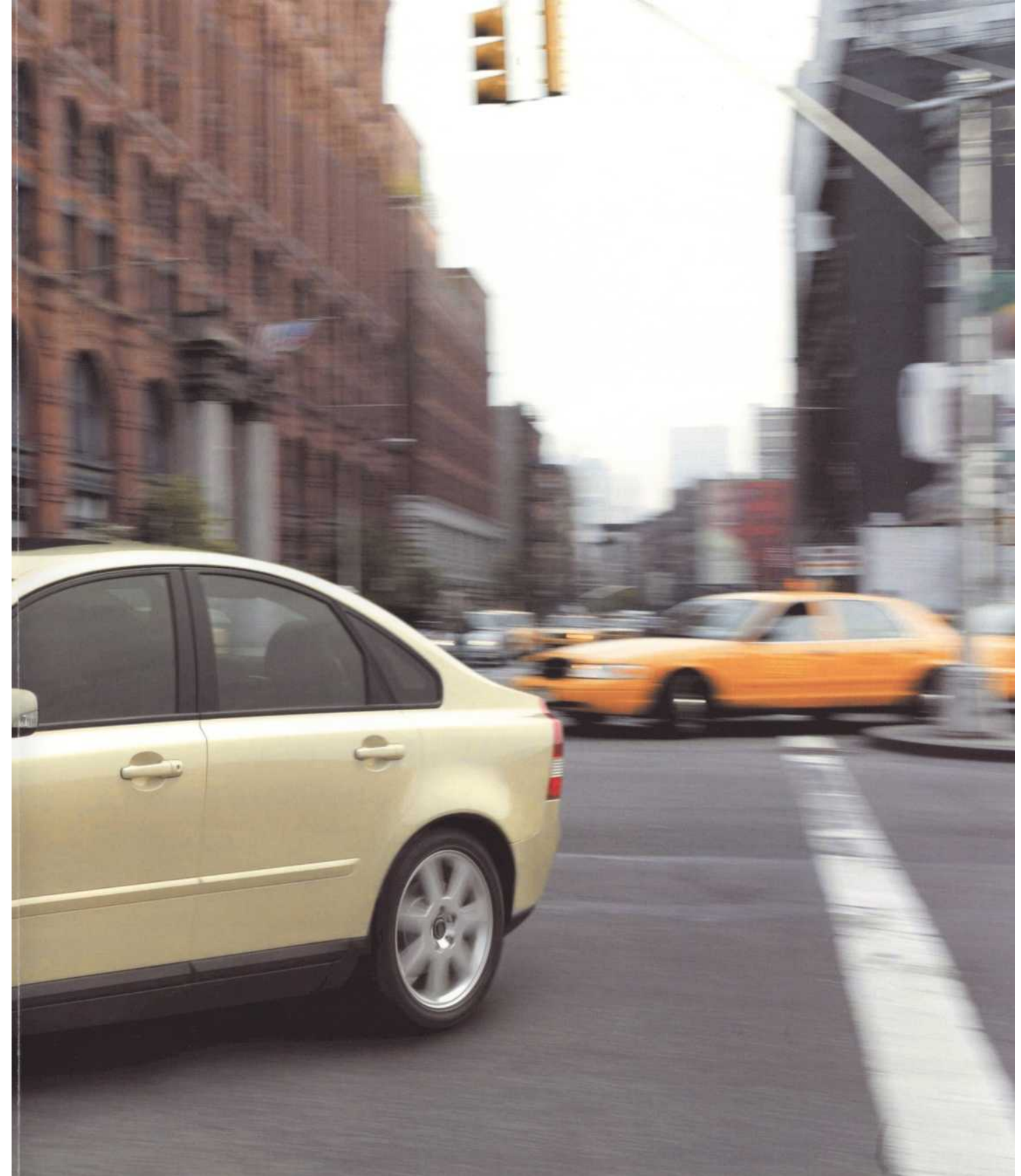
product of the Ford-PSA diesel partnership.

A 1.8-litre petrol engine will arrive in May, while entry-level petrol and diesel models, both using 1.6-litre engines, arrive early in 2005.

An all-wheel drive version of the T5 has also been left off the UK new S40 line-up, but all-

wheel drive will feature on T5 versions of the forthcoming V50 Sportswagon.

Supply of the new S40 to the UK is restricted, which should have a positive impact on residual values. UK allocation will be 7,000 units in the first full year with all engine variants, while 2003 will see new S40 sales of



just under 3,500, plus a similar number of existing S40 models, badged Classic.

It is difficult to place the S40 when comparing it with rivals. On price it competes with the Audi A3 and BMW 3-series Compact, but it makes an attractive proposition for Volkswagen Bora and Alfa Romeo 156 drivers as

well as those at the lower end of the Audi A4 and BMW 3-series saloon ranges.

As usual, Volvo expects to make up ground on its rivals by offering better specification levels. Standard equipment on S models includes electronic climate control, a CD/radio, four electric windows, eight airbags,

ABS with emergency braking assistance, anti-whiplash seats and 16-inch alloy wheels.

SE models, priced at £2,250 more than the S, add leather seats, steering wheel-mounted audio controls, an auto-dimming rear view mirror, rain-sensing wipers, cruise control, 17-inch alloy wheels, front fog lamps, a trip

computer and a six-CD autochanger. A Sport model will join the range during 2004.

Although the 2.4 will be priced at about £18,500, the 1.8 arriving in the middle of the year will undercut this by £2,500, giving an entry price of around £16,000 on-the-road. The 1.6-litre version is expected to cost around £15,000.

FIRST DRIVE: NEW VOLVO S40



'The new Volvo S40 is a sleek and eye-catching car. Better to drive than any Volvo to date, it manages to project a youthful image while still retaining Volvo's core values of safety and comfort.'



BEHIND THE WHEEL

LOOKING like a slightly smaller version of the S60, the new Volvo S40 has a classy appearance. Its proportions are slightly different, with a short nose and tail emphasising the size of the cabin section.

Although the S40 is smaller than the existing model, it is taller and wider with more interior space.

The focal point of the interior is the 'floating' centre console which comprises a single panel where the main audio and climate functions are located, while the space behind, which would be inaccessible in other cars, has become a storage area. It really is a unique feature and is bound to be a talking point for anyone else travelling in the car.

However, the interior seems to be short of other obvious storage areas, with shallow door bins, and although the glove compartment is deep, it is quite narrow.

The boot is also deep, and despite the short boot lid it is hinged so it will fold back very close to the rear window, maximising the aperture for loading and unloading.

Of course, for those who need the practicality of five doors, the V50 Sportswagon is on the way.

The seats are typically comfortable - Volvo must be the



industry leader in this respect - while two adults can sit comfortably in the rear, or three if they don't mind getting intimate.

Only 2.4-litre automatic and manual T5 models were available to drive on the launch, giving us a taste of the five-cylinder end of the range.

Leaving aside the engines for a moment, the electro-hydraulic

steering offers more resistance and feedback than any other car in the Volvo range, while the benefit of the longer wheelbase and wider track are evident in the S40's behaviour on challenging roads.

Body roll is virtually non-existent, while the S40's ride is composed, if a little 'floaty' over undulating stretches of road.

At the launch in southern Spain the weather was awful. Driving into the hills in thick fog patches and on rain-soaked roads I was a little cautious taking hairpin bends in the T5.

If it's anything like other Volvo T5s, I thought, the front wheels would be scrabbling for traction.

However, I gradually built up confidence and discovered there was far more grip than I imagined. It reached the stage when I thought the traction control warning light might have

been broken, but under severe provocation the nose edged wide.

Despite the vocal nature of the five-cylinder engines, both the T5 and the 2.4 were remarkably quiet, offering an entertaining warble under hard acceleration. It isn't particularly loud, but you know the engine is there and keen to play.

The five-speed automatic transmission has a relaxed nature, but there is also a manual shift should the driver feel the need for a bit of DIY.

Driving verdict

THE Volvo S40 is a sleek and eye-catching car. Better to drive than any Volvo to date, it manages to project a more youthful image while still retaining Volvo's core values of safety and comfort. We look forward to trying the diesel, and eagerly await the V50.

NEW VOLVO S40 FACT FILE

Model:	S40	T5	2.0D
Engine (cc):	2,435	2,521	1,998
Max power (bhp/rpm):	170/6,000	220/5,000	136/4,000
Max torque (lb-ft):	170/4,400	236/1,500	251/2,000
Max speed (mph):	137 (134)	149 (146)	130
0-62mph (sec):	8.2 (8.9)	6.8 (7.2)	9.5
Fuel consumption (mpg):	33.2 (31.0)	32.5 (30.0)	50.4
CO2 emissions (g/km):	203 (217)	208 (224)	148
Fuel tank capacity (l/gal):	62/13.6 (diesel 55/12.1)		
Transmission:	5-sp man, 6-sp man, 5-sp auto		
Service intervals (miles):	12,000		
On sale:	March 2004.		
Prices (est):	£17,255 - £23,750		

Figures in brackets for automatic models

Reprinted from Fleet News, November 6, 2003. The information given with regard to tax liability is for guidance only. The tax position for different drivers will vary according to personal circumstances and drivers should consult a tax accountant for specialist advice. For further information on any model in the Volvo range, or to arrange a test drive, please contact the Volvo Business Centre on 0845 600 4000