

Volvo wafts into the future

 By [Henrie Geyser](#)

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I have been on a magical carpet ride into the future of motoring, courtesy of the Volvo XC90 armed with two power sources - a two-litre petrol engine and an electric rear axle drive (ERAD) powered by a 9.2kWh battery pack.

The large and plush Volvo XC90 T8 AWD Inscription can be driven in one of three driving modes: Pure (electric power only), hybrid (which uses both petrol and electric engines) and power (which provides maximum power from both petrol and electric engines).



These are supported by two supplementary driving modes: AWD (both engines run at all times and maintains the charge in the battery), and off-road, which provides extra grip by activating the electronic limited slip differential and activates hill descent control (why I don't know, because I just cannot see anybody going rock-clambering in this elegant wagon, but then it is probably aimed more at the snowy roads of Sweden).

The car's battery can also be charged on the trot by swiping the touchscreen and selecting charge. Under normal circumstances, the battery is charged via a cable plugged into a mains plug and connected to a side socket on the vehicle.

Easy to manage

In the pure electric mode, the XC90 has a driving range of 43km if it is driven gently (which includes coasting as often as possible) if the weather is fine and the roads are in good condition.



It all sounds quite technical but it once you have studied the manual and experimented with the various options it becomes quite easy to manage. If the Volvo is used daily then the manufacturer recommends that it be charged overnight (at an estimated R20 extra on your electricity bill per full charge).

The “silent mode” takes some getting used to but once up and on the go, the total bafflement on the faces of people who watched me slide aboard and float out of a parking lot without a sound coming from the Volvo’s tailpipe never failed to amuse me.

The big wagon’s creamy ride is pure pleasure. It just wafts along, even in power mode. The 2.0-litre engine produces a fairly robust 300kW and 640Nm (which increases to 311kW and 680Nm if fitted with Polestar optimisation as on our test vehicle).

Clear, all-round views

The 8-speed automatic gearbox is smooth and the cog-swapping process happens almost unnoticed. Although the big Volvo is fairly heavy and high-riding, it handles the corners confidently, even at fair lick. The steering feel feels a tad heavy at times, particularly when squeezing into tight parking bay, but the excellent overhead image projection of the parking camera does a superb job of providing clear, all-round views.

As to be expected from Volvo, this twin-engine family-wagon has a full armoury of safety equipment including stability control, seven airbags, pedestrian and cyclist detection, auto brake at intersections, front collision with warning and full auto brake, plus a lot more, all adding up to a five-star Euro NCAP safety rating.



The standard list of features will need a few pages to describe in detail, but it does include active LED headlights that turn in the corners, a powered tailgate, soft Nappa leather upholstery, seven seats, panoramic sunroof, drive mode selector and 4-zone automatic climate control.

R1-million plus price range

As befitting a vehicle in the R1-million plus price range, the list of optional extras is equally long but a few that stand out include Nappa leather, ventilated front seats (R11,000), massage function for the front seats, air suspension with active chassis (R26,500), Polestar Optimisation and a premium pack that includes the nifty park assist 360-degree HD camera.

Our test car was fitted with all of this, plus more, which added R135,975 to its recommended selling price of R1,148,000. The standard price includes a five-year/100,000km warranty and a five-year/100,000km full maintenance plan.

This Volvo is only one of only two plug-in hybrid-electric vehicles (PHEV) to arrive in this country, the other being the BMW X5 xDrive40e Steptronic. Being very much a niche market option, this floating Volvo is never going to be a big seller in a country where long distances, undulating and, at times, badly corrugated roads, lack of public charging facilities and its scorching purchase price will outweigh its environmentally-friendly character and the bragging rights that go with its uniqueness.

Although it is a superb vehicle in many ways, in this country it will be admired as a flag-bearer for the Volvo brand and an expensive showpiece for the future of automotive technology, destined for a lucky few with thick wallets and a passion for uniqueness.

ABOUT HENRIE GEYSER

Henrie Geyser joined the online publishing industry through iafrica.com where he worked for five years as news editor and editor. He now freelances for a variety of print and online publications, on the subjects of cars, food, and travel, among others; and is a member of the South African Guild of Motoring Journalists. henrieg@iafrica.com

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