

Making a Statement

Roomy Volvo Sedan Has Distinctive Design, Elegant Cabin

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Volvo has spent the last few years releasing an onslaught of vehicles for people who want a full-blown, design-driven luxury experience, not only the most safety gadgets.

Perhaps no Volvo represents this shift in product philosophy more than this one, its S90 flagship sedan.

Yes, the spacious, solid-feeling S90 is available with the kinds of mind-bending safety tech on which this brand has long hung its hat. It has automatic braking and collision avoidance capability. If it senses you're going to leave the roadway, it can take over the steering wheel to keep you on pavement.

It has the best self-driving capability of any car today, outside of Tesla and one expensive Cadillac model. It even has sensors that — I'm not kidding — will detect a moose in the road.

But my biggest impression after driving the S90 isn't centered around the moose-sensing, life-saving safety gizmos. To me, the current S90 is more about the statement it makes



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VOLVO S90

The Volvo S90 has a sleek roofline and narrow grille that emphasizes its width, something very different from the trend of gaping noses on today's luxury cars.

through elegant design and the serene presence it creates as you drive it, two things that have eluded Volvo's cars until recently.

Few large sedans are as visually striking as this one, owing both to a conservative design backlash following the 2008 market crash and the luxury segment's habit of playing "follow the Germans."

To be fair, the S90 tries to emulate the best attributes of the big-boy German sedans. Its bank-vault cabin approaches the silence and peace of the Mercedes-Benz S-Class, and its grippy all-wheel-drive handling seems inspired by the sparkling high-end BMWs.

Stylistically, though, it's speaking its own language.

This is a car that while surprisingly large and high — including an extended-wheelbase version this year — looks sleek, low-slung and almost coupe-like.

Its front end has a wide, narrow grille that draws your eye horizontally, something very different from most contemporary luxury cars. Gaping, garish, almost comically huge grilles seem to be in fashion right now, but the Volvo stands apart with its sleeker, more pencil-tipped nose.

Inside, it gets even better.

I'm not sure where Volvo finds their interior designers, but they're doing some of the best work on the planet right now. The materials, construction and carefully drawn lines make this one of the most pleasant cabins I've ever enjoyed in a car priced under \$100,000.

You have to sit in an S90 to get the full experience because it envelops all your senses. It looks peaceful and relaxing, something you can see in pictures of its open-pore wood, supple leather and sculpture like metal accents.

Images can't convey the scents and tactile variety that make this car so relaxing, though. The cold touch of real metal, naturally rough feeling of the wood and almost unimaginable smoothness of the leather make you feel wrapped in a cocoon of perfection, isolated from the gritty real world.

Power in my tester came from a 2.0-liter, four-cylinder engine that's both turbocharged and supercharged to generate 316 horsepower, an eye-popping size-to-power ratio. It felt like ample power, but I admit missing the rumble and grunt of a V8 in this class of car.

If you want a more V8-like experience, oddly enough, you'll need to choose the new plug-in hybrid version of the S90. It makes 400 horsepower and offers the best performance.

Pricing starts at a reasonable \$48,100 for the S90 Momentum or

\$58,600 for the more upscale Inscription. The T8 plug-in hybrid starts at \$63,650.

What was tested?

2018 Volvo S90 T6 AWD (\$54,100). Options: Inscription features (\$4,500), convenience package (\$2,550), metallic paint (\$595), head-up display (\$900), 20-inch wheels with summer tires (\$800), Bowers and Wilkins premium sound (\$3,200), heated steering wheel (\$300), premium rear air suspension (\$1,200). Price as tested (including \$995 destination charge): \$69,140

Wheelbase: 120.5 in.

Length: 200.1 in.

Width: 79.5 in.

Height: 57.1 in.

Engine: 2.0-liter four cylinder, supercharged and turbocharged (318 hp, 295 lb.-ft.)

Transmission: Eight-speed automatic

Fuel economy: 22 city, 31 highway

RATINGS

Style: 10

Performance: 8

Price: 8

Handling: 7

Ride: 9

Comfort: 10

Quality: 9

Overall: 9

Why buy it?

It's a serene, elegant, visually striking sedan that happens to offer some of the most advanced safety technology ever offered on a car.



The S90's cabin is a peaceful place to spend time. Design, materials and construction give it a sense of spa-like relaxation.