



X-ta-C!

There's no question that Volvo's new XC90 is a head turner – but what's it like to drive? Kieran Rennie gets behind the wheel of the T6 Inscription version...

Volvo has never been questioned for its lack of innovation and the outgoing XC90 was a well respected option in the premium SUV segment. Buzzwords like cred, gravitas and presence (and resale value) however, separated (perhaps unfairly) the Swedish auto maker's offering from that of the German triumvirate's.

More recently, other brands – including Range Rover have added themselves to the mix, complicating the hierarchy even further. With all being said, the new XC90 is going to have a big Sandton City kerb to climb.

For the XC90 to even begin to compete in this company the spec list would have to be beyond impressive and, in the T6 Inscription, it is. Stand-out features for me include adaptive cruise control – which accurately maintains following distances and even brings the car to a gentle and predictable halt if the traffic you're following stops – and the lane departure warning system, which works to help keep you travelling safely within your lane.



Try to change lanes without indicating and the steering wheel vibrates slightly and the steering system tries, very gently, to move the car back into line. At no point do you feel that the system is invasive or dangerous – as the driver, you override the computer inputs by simply continuing with what you're trying to do.

Performance on the T6, or rather the power-plant, is one of the major factors that sets this vehicle apart from gas guzzling Godzillas. The T6 is powered by a 2,0-litre turbocharged and supercharged four-pot that produces 235kW.



Priced from **R804 000**

Exact performance figures for a car like this are almost irrelevant but suffice to say, the 2,7-ton family wagon is faster than it needs to be. And when mated to a silky smooth, eight-speed auto 'box, the XC is as impressive when plodding through stop-start grid lock as it is when caning a boy racer at a traffic light – 0-100km/h in a claimed 6,5 secs in case you were wondering.

Fuel consumption is said to be in the 8,0-litre/100km range in the combined cycle. Now, while I never attained anywhere near that figure – seeing a best of 13 litres/100km on a mostly urban route – there is no doubt that smaller, force fed engines make more sense than larger motors. Especially if there is, as is the case here, very little sacrifice in performance.

Volvo's range topping T8 Twin Engine (hybrid) pushes this very necessary, environmentally conscious shift in thinking even further. Expect that car to land in South Africa in the first third of 2016.

Pricing for the XC90 range start at R804 000 for the FWD D4 and tops out at R1 066 400 for the upcoming T8 R-Design. The T6 Inscription reviewed here will set you back R907 600. A five-year/100 000km Volvo Plan is standard across the range.

This car should absolutely be on your shopping list if you're lucky enough to have this kind of money. Because of the tech? No. The performance? No. And even considering that this car is a looker, styling is in the eye of the beholder. Then, why?

It's all of the above and more. The XC90 feels special. It feels classy. It makes you want to own an SUV even if you don't need one.

