

2005–2006 VOLVO S40/V50



While the previous generation was built on a Mitsubishi platform, Volvo's new S40/V50 shares the architecture used by the Mazda 3 and European Ford Focus. In fact, engineers from all three automakers worked together to devise this new platform, which lets each car express its own personality through customized suspension and steering settings, etc. The body is 68 percent more rigid than the

previous generation. This compact Volvo—similar in size to the Honda Civic sedan—is available as a sedan and station wagon, in basic, T5 and T5 AWD trims. The T5 AWD model comes with on-demand all-wheel-drive.

The main new feature for 2006 is the all-wheel-drive system, which reacts faster thanks to the 59 lbs. of torque applied to the rear wheels.

Interior and trunk

The front seats are easy to get into and very comfortable, as is always the case with Volvo. Adjustable lumbar support is offered on both front seats, which is unusual, especially in a car in this price range. The driving position is very good, due, among other things, to the tilt/telescopic steering column.

Rear passenger access is less than spectacular because the doors don't open very wide. Exiting the rear seats is complicated by the lack of space between the B-pillar and the rear seat cushion. The bench can comfortably accommodate two adults, with ample legroom. However, headroom is very limited for taller passengers. The folding seatback splits 60/40, but the seats don't fold completely flat in the V50 because the larger section rests on the central head restraint. The other head restraints can be removed from the seatback and placed in the cushion sheaths when removed. Unfortunately, there isn't a sheath for the central head restraint.



The trunk of the S40 can hold plenty of smaller items but the opening isn't big enough for larger cargo. The V50's bulky rear fenders result in mediocre storage capacity. The rear hatch doesn't open high enough for taller people.

Convenience and safety



The interior is superbly appointed with quality materials, but falls short on soundproofing against engine and road noise. Interior storage capacity also leaves a lot to be desired, from the small glove compartment and Lilliputian front door map pockets to the tiny bin between the front seats and a thoroughly unimpressive cubby behind the ultra-thin free-standing central console. In fact, only the seat pockets are normal size. In addition, the cup holders aren't big enough for all drink sizes. And it's easy to catch a jacket sleeve on the accessory outlet when changing gears on the manual transmission.

The instruments and controls are well organized, except for the turn signal and windshield wiper levers, which are too close to the wheel and can be activated accidentally when turning the steering wheel, especially if you're wearing gloves. The four big dials on the central console are intuitive and easy to use. However, the pushbuttons for the other controls are a bit on the small side. The air conditioner does its job well.

In terms of safety, this new Volvo is equipped with two front airbags, two side airbags, two curtain airbags, four ABS disc brakes, a whiplash protection system on the front seats, five head restraints, and good headlights. Unfortunately, the head restraints do not go high enough for taller people. Visibility is very good in all directions except to the rear, where it is hampered by the two outboard head restraints.

Engine and transmission

The five-cylinder 2.4 litre engine generates 168 horsepower and 170 pound-feet of torque. On paper, these figures point to lively performance. On the road, this Volvo is indeed relatively peppy and has good pickup provided the engine is running over 3,000 RPM. The engine is noisy at highway speeds. Those looking for more power may wish to opt for the 218 HP five-cylinder turbo. Both engines meet ULEV (Ultra Low Emissions Vehicle) standards.

The easy-shifting five-speed manual transmission is precise and smooth, although it would be nice if the motor ran at a few hundred RPM less in fifth gear. The clutch is smooth, but relatively firm.

The all-wheel-drive system splits torque 95/5 front-to-rear in normal driving conditions. Torque distribution can be completely reversed if the front wheels start to slip. Torque transfers to the rear wheels very quickly. When pulling heavy loads, the system transfers more torque to the rear wheels.

On the road

Despite its firmness, the fully independent suspension generally delivers a comfortable ride, although reactions can be almost harsh on uneven surfaces. Handling is good even on bumpy pavement. The car maintains its course without much extra effort from the driver.

The power steering is well weighted, stable, precise, and quick, and offers a modicum of road feel. The brakes are fade resistant, but braking distances are a bit long for emergency stops.

Inspection at a CAA-Quebec Technical Inspection Centre showed that the new Volvo is very well built and well protected against corrosion.

Conclusion

According to Volvo, the first generation of this car was designed for empty-nesters. We have to admit that this new generation stays true to target. Knowing the intended audience, we can accept the idea of a smaller car, but Volvo designers could still have given it more storage space. This shortcoming doesn't detract from this Volvo's comfort, handling, or active and passive safety features, although Volvo should hold back a bit in pricing their options, whether individually or as part of a package.

PROS: Choice of models and trims, comfortable seats, pleasant manual transmission, good handling, solid construction, drivability

CONS: Sub par soundproofing, insufficient storage space, rear access, head restraints too short for taller passengers, small trunk opening (S40), option prices

2005 VOLVO S40/V50

Engine: 20 valve, 2.4 litre, 5 cylinder; 20 valve, 2.5 litre, 5 cylinder, turbo

Horsepower: 168 HP at 6,000 RPM; 218 HP at 5,000 RPM

Torque: 170 pound-feet at 4,400 RPM; 236 pound-feet at 1,500 to 4,800 RPM

Transmission: 5 or 6 speed manual; 5 speed automatic

Suspension: Independent/independent

Brakes: Disc/disc

Length: 446.8 cm (V50: 451.4 cm)

Width: 177 cm

Height: 145.2 cm

Wheelbase: 264 cm

Weight: 1,399 to 1,456 kg

Tires: 205/55R16; 205/50R17

Towing capacity: 1,500 kg

Airbags: Standard, plus two lateral and two curtain airbags

Fuel consumption for the 2.4 litre engine and manual transmission

- According to Transport Canada: City: 10.8 L/100 km (26 mpg); Highway: 7.3 L/100 km (39 mpg)
- Test drive: 10.5 L/100 km (27 mpg) Temperature: 13°C to 30°C

Fuel tank capacity: 62 litres

Acceleration

0–100 km/h: 8.7 seconds

60–100 km/h: 6 seconds

Competitors: Acura TSX, Audi A4, Mazda6, Saab 9-3, Subaru Legacy

Warranties

- Full basic coverage: 4 years/80,000 km
- Powertrain: 4 years/80,000 km
- Surface corrosion: 1 year/unlimited km
- Perforation damage: 5 years/unlimited km
- Emissions control system: 4 years/80,000 km (full coverage); 8 years/130,000 km (catalytic converter, electronic control module and onboard diagnostic system)

Factory replacement parts

Rear bumper: \$746

Front brake disc: \$131

Brake pads: \$83

Muffler: \$372

Front fender: \$298

Average insurance cost: (Quebec City, replacement cost endorsement, claim-free insurance record, male or female driver 30 to 40 years old): \$977 to \$1,456

Price according to trim line:

S40 2.4i: \$29,995	V50 2.4i: \$32,120
S40 T5: \$35,620	V50 T5: \$37,120
S40 T5 AWD: \$38,120	V50 T5 AWD: \$39,620

Main options:

Automatic transmission: \$1,500 to \$2,125
Premium Package: \$1,450 to \$4,950
Climate Package: \$1,100 to \$1,600
Convenience Package: \$900
Dynamic Package: \$6,100 to \$7,200
Leather seats: \$1,950
Sport Package: \$2,550 to \$4,350

Price as tested:

S40 2.4i: \$33,995	V50 2.4i: \$36,220
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Transportation/preparation costs: \$1,295

No. of dealers: Quebec: 14 Canada: 57

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