

Dead serious ...in a good way

OLD PERCEPTIONS HEAD FOR THE EXIT

Old perceptions do die hard. It's been 18 years since Danny DeVito's turn as an advertising guru in *Renaissance Man* generated the memorable slogan: "Volvo. They're boxy but they're good." On the plus side, Volvo maintains its Pavlovian match to "safety," decades after advanced safety features have become universal. (Universal or not, Volvo is still a safety leader—see sidebar.)

But boxy this is not—that's readily apparent. The S60 concept car at the Detroit and Geneva shows in early

2010 (shown at right) shattered that illusion, and it wasn't the first. But as we noted at that time—choosing it as one of our four favorites in Detroit—"with rear-hinged rear doors, thin-shell sport seats, styling details from grille to lights to vents to glass amped up beyond your father's Volvo, this concept challenges the Audi Sportback for show-stopping quality." (The Sportback, another of our picks in Detroit, came to market as the Audi A7, nobody's idea of stodgy.)

BY JOE SAGE



A driver's car with a capital R

The S60 R-Design has Volvo's most powerful production engine ever—a turbocharged Polestar Performance 3.0-liter 325-hp inline-six—reaching 60 mph in just 5.5 seconds (0.3 seconds faster than the regular T6) and with 8 percent more horsepower and 9 percent more torque. The Polestar upgrade brings more air and fuel into the combustion chambers, plus advanced spark timing, yet fuel mileage ratings stay exactly the same as with the standard T6. A second-gen six-speed automatic includes a Sport mode, as well as Geartronic for manual shifts. The electronic all-wheel-drive system includes Instant Traction® and Corner Traction Control—all based on the car's Dynamic Stability and Traction Control (DSTC).

For a stiffer body and improved steering response, a strut brace ties together the front towers, while the rear features monotube dampers combining compression and return damping. Front and rear springs are shortened by 15mm, which helps handling and conveys attitude. Spring stiffness is 15 percent higher than in the standard S60 T6, rear suspension bushings are 20 percent stiffer, and the rear suspension's front tie-rod bushing is a striking 400 percent stiffer than in the regular S60, to counteract wheel bounce and shake.

The S60 R-Design comes standard with the City Safety low-speed collision avoidance/mitigation system, and Pedestrian Detection with Full Auto Brake is available as part of an optional Technology Package.

The S60 pecking order

The overall S60 lineup for 2012 continues two powertrain options from 2011. A T5 (inline five-cylinder turbo) front-wheel-drive model starts at \$31,300, and a T6 (inline six-cylinder turbo) with all-wheel drive brings the base price to \$38,450. New this year is the S60 R-Design, starting with the same T6 engine, but with power increased from 300 hp to 325, and with 354 lb-ft of torque. (We'll cover Volvo's new Polestar Performance Tuning further in our May/June issue.) Besides the aforementioned chassis modifications, the R-Design has model-specific interior and exterior style points. Base



price for the S60 T6 AWD R-Design is \$42,500.

Upgrading from the T5 to the T6 brings the S60 up to 18-inch alloy wheels, Dynamic Chassis and multi-setting speed-sensitive steering. The R-Design, in addition to its 25-horse power boost, will bring you a power glass moonroof, different 18-inch alloys, dual xenon headlamps and the lower, firmer Sport Chassis. Exterior design cues up front include an R-Design lower front spoiler, air intake and black gloss grille with R-Design emblem. In back, the car is distinguished by an R-Design rear diffuser, 3.5-inch polished exhaust tips and a rear spoiler. The more you hear and the more you see, the more you know this is not your granddad's Volvo. The interior gets R-Design embossed leather sport seats, blue watch dial instrument cluster, aluminum inlays, sport pedals, and more R-Design emblems—on the sport steering wheel, on floor mats with accent piping and on the shift lever.

Our test S60 included a Multimedia Package (premium sound, backup camera and voice-controlled navigation) for \$2700, plus a Climate Package (heated front seats, heated headlight and windshield washers, rain sensors and an Interior Air Quality System) for \$800. Total sticker for our test S60 T6 AWD R-Design, with \$875 destination charge, was \$46,875.

R-Design drive time

We began our S60 R-Design time by noting a range of interface details, common with any vehicle, moreso the higher they climb in cost and features. The car's visually clean instrument panel design does end up generating as many complications as any. We made notes about its implementation of keyless entry, about the steering column having manual tilt/telescope, about syncing temperatures in the air handling unit, but mostly about the control interface, noted in our logbook as "a combination of simple that's not really simple, because so much complexity is jammed into very small areas."

Starting on the second day, we resolved to simply ignore all that and just drive. We found the S60 R-Design to be a fine sedan, well featured, with some noticeable pep in its step. Competition is intense in this segment, and the car has its work cut out for it. Volvo traditionalists may find this to be outside their comfort envelope, while performance buyers have to be made aware of what Volvo now brings to the table. And they do bring it. In fact, the dual personality inherent in a performance Volvo underscores perhaps its best characteristic: amid all the Audis and BMWs, the S60 R-Design can be the real sleeper, with plenty of surprises in store. ■



Awards: Engine-Safety-Interior

BEST ENGINES. 2011 marked a first for Volvo, with its powerful T6 engine picked as one of Ward's 10 Best Engines. According to *Ward's AutoWorld*, "Volvo clearly benchmarked BMW in developing the supremely smooth T6 engine, based on its delicious midrange power band and paucity of turbo lag. This engine is perfectly suited for the all-new S60 and powers it into contention against bigger, better-established luxury entries." The 300-hp T6 has torque matching the Volvo V8, but at just 2100 rpm, compared to 3950 rpm for the V8. The T6 is 17 percent more fuel-efficient than the V8, at 18/26 MPG city/highway in the S60. The T6 is available in the S80, XC60 and XC70.

BEST INTERIORS. The S60 sports sedan has also been named to the Ward's 10 Best Interiors list. *Ward's* says, "The Volvo S60 is a study in Scandinavian serenity. From the beautifully angular door panels to the floating center stack, the S60 is an undiscovered gem in the heart of the luxury market. Among the S60's best features are the sleek head restraints for front-seat occupants, which stand out in a world of intrusive head restraints upsized to meet new federal crash standards. Leave it to Volvo to make a safety device sexy."

TOP SAFETY PICKS. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) has named the 2011-12 Volvo S60 a Top Safety Pick. The S60 earned top marks of "Good" in all three testing categories of roof strength, frontal offset and side impact tests. According to IIHS, "the roof of the S60 withstood a force equal to 4.95 times the car's weight. By comparison, the current federal standard is 1.5 times weight." Five Volvos have been named IIHS 2012 Top Safety Picks, a total unsurpassed by any other luxury car brand: the C30, S60, S80, XC60 and XC90. ■