



Volvo XC70

By Steve Schutz, MD

These are interesting times for Volvo, apparently Sweden's lone surviving automaker—if recent reports are true, Saab seems likely to die—as it embarks on a new path with a new life partner. (Am I the only one who thinks these automobile manufacturer unions seem a lot like human relationships? There's certainly plenty of flirting, courting, merging, and regret involved.)

Anyway, Volvo got with Ford about ten years ago in a merger of mature and serious companies that seemed destined to last forever. Then suddenly they broke up, and Volvo was purchased by China's Geely Motors, kind of an upstart sugar daddy. That happened in 2010, and amazingly, an apparent relationship of convenience seems to be working. In general, sugar daddys want something in exchange for the security they provide, and now Geely wants Volvo to go to China and sell a bunch of cars there. That's a big mission change for Volvo, and only time will tell if they'll succeed.

One thing about Volvo that will never change is their focus on safety, which inevitably leads to life-saving innovations. A couple of new ones are worth some time here. The optional collision warning/"Autobrake" system warns you with a loud alarm and flashing lights in the dash if you approach an obstacle too fast. Under normal driving conditions this feature

is never activated, but if your mind wanders and you don't brake when you should, it will definitely grab your attention. I tested it a few times and was impressed.

Along with Mercedes, Volvo now offers a driver fatigue warning system that alerts you when it senses that you're nodding off. While I didn't test this feature, I'm sure it would appeal to the many BCMS members like me who regularly drive to the hospital in the middle of the night on call.

Regular readers know that I believe strongly that doctors should drive safe vehicles. One of the reasons I harp on this is because of an unforgettable trip back home from the hospital I took several years ago. I was on IH 10 going west toward Boerne at around 2 AM when I saw headlights coming toward me. To my shock, I saw a pickup truck heading eastbound in the far left lane of the westbound interstate. I pulled way over onto the shoulder and was never really in danger, but I learned a lesson in how ridiculously stupid drunk drivers can be. And how exposed doctors are just doing their jobs in the middle of the night. Now all of my family vehicles are as safe as they can be. Yes, one is a Volvo.

The vehicle I tested for this column was the XC 70 station wagon, a Volvo standard since it first launched in this country in 1997. Today's XC 70 is part of the fourth generation of this



platform, which was introduced in 2007 as an '08 model.

Station wagons are not especially popular these days as more and more buyers opt for crossover SUVs, but there continues to be a steady market for Volvo wagons. XC 70 customers tend to prefer understated designs, and the 2011 version is all about understatement. There's not an ugly body panel to be found on this car, but neither is there any visual excitement. If you buy a new XC 70 and expect admiring glances from your neighbors or the barista at Starbucks, you're going to be disappointed.

The interior is more inspired. Typically Volvo buttons, knobs, and gauges abound, as you'd expect, and the XC also includes a more recent Volvo touch, a central panel with space for storage behind it. The days of long audio systems that accept CDs or cassettes are mostly gone, and I'm happy to see at

least one auto manufacturer put that saved space to use. It's very handy.

No piece about a Volvo would be complete without a mention of the seats, so here goes. Volvos have great seats, always. They're the right size for me (6' 2") and my wife (5' 4"), and they feel good when you sit in them, even on a long drive. It's a simple thing in theory—make seats that are comfortable to sit in—but no manufacturer does it better than Volvo.

Naturally, there's lots of room for five plus a big dog in the back. With 33 ft³ behind the rear seats, the XC 70 can actually fit more stuff than many more popular (and stylish) crossovers.

Space does not allow a full run-down of the options available on the XC 70, but expect a transaction price of between \$38,000 and \$43,000 for a nicely equipped model.

For a company that's gone from independent to Ford-owned to Geely-owned in just a few years, this is an interesting time for Volvo. As long as Sweden's last car company continues to focus on safety and produce vehicles like the XC 70, I think they'll be fine.



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