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Car Reviews



Volvo S60

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The new Volvo S60 takes safety to a different level.

The new S60 is already a very good car to begin with. The exterior is handsome and well-designed, with subtle creases and bumps in the bodywork to keep even an Audi A5 fan happy. Inside the seats are extremely comfortable and the familiar Volvo DNA ever present. The front-wheel drive S60 is green, too, and has a new star under the bonnet - the powerful, tax band 'B', 2-litre diesel 'D3' with 163bhp (400nm).

D3 is going to put the 'frighteners' on BMW's 320d and Audi's A4. The new D3 sits below the 2.5-litre D5 and is a blast. The five-cylinder turbodiesel makes a lovely roar when you accelerate hard and the level of torque is more than enough. All-wheel drive versions and a V6 petrol are being made but they will be too pricey for Ireland.

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I put the S60 through its paces at the car's European launch centre in Portugal and came away very impressed.

The really big story concerns the S60's safety systems and its Pedestrian Detection Technology. This is a brilliant, life-saving technology that while still in development will become the norm for all cars in the future - it is that good. With the optional new Driver Assist Pack (circa €2,500) fitted to my test car I repeatedly drove at a mannequin of a child at speeds of up to 35km/h with my foot on the accelerator pedal and no intention of braking. The car calculated that there was going to be an impact, sounded an alert and then applied full braking to the car - with absolutely no involvement from me! Wow!

The new S60 has a camera-mounted on the windscreen near the rearview mirror and a radar in the front grille. When the car senses that an object similar to a child or adult is going to come into contact with the car it will apply 1G of braking and come to a complete stop at speeds of up to 35km/h without a collision. The system doesn't work at night or in very bad visibility but still it is a fantastic leap forward.

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Total Adults

Children (2yo+)

Infants (<2yo)

Occupancy

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You may remember Volvo a couple of years ago with the XC60 SUV brought a similar system to the world. Then 'City-Safe' used a laser mounted on the windscreen to calculate if the car was going to have a slow speed impact in stop-start traffic and in a similar way would apply the brakes. City-Safe is standard in the S60 also!

The car is coming later this year in limited numbers, but dealers will have S60 demos for test drives and ordering for 2011. A 1.6-litre, entry-level petrol is coming, too, as is an eco 1.6 diesel. For me, the D3 is the only choice as it combines low price and running costs with the extra bit of grunt buyers of compact executive cars want.

The standard S60 without the additional Driver Assist Pack undercuts its rivals by a good margin. With the Pedestrian Detection Technology added, you will have a car that could save a life and at the very least save thousands of euro in crash damage should you ever be distracted at city speeds.

Michael Sheridan



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