



Product news

Swedes take on Germans in car war on two fronts

Volvo's C30 hatchback targets premium spot

FIRST DRIVE

Volvo's new C30 is one of the most eagerly awaited cars of 2007, as it aims to tempt buyers out of the Audi A3 and BMW 1 Series. It's the company's smallest product, harking back to some popular earlier models.

It's a hatchback, though officially it's called a 'SportsCoupé', which clearly shows its intention to be more about style and driving than outright practicality. It shares much with the Ford Focus (Ford is Volvo's parent company), which is no bad thing, as the Focus is currently one of our Best Buys.

We tried the 125bhp 1.8 petrol engine in SE trim model. It was comfortable and enjoyable to drive but performance wasn't dazzling at low revs. Motorway driving was mixed – fifth gear was very flexible but the lack of a sixth gear meant the revs and engine noise were high at the speed limit.

The steering was pleasingly light and direct, making it enjoyable on twisty roads. But fuel economy was only 28.5mpg on our test, rising to 40mpg on the motorway.

It has the ability to turn heads with its squat, purposeful looks and unusual flat glass tailgate. Inside, it is similar to the larger S40, with a logical dash layout and Volvo's now-familiar 'floating' centre console.

Space in the rear is adequate for two adults on shorter trips, although six-footers will find their head scraping the ceiling. It can't seat three, as there are two separate chairs, divided by a fold-down armrest.

The boot could be the C30's downside for drivers. The opening is awkward, especially for loading wide or tall items. And storage is rather poky with a fiddly fabric luggage cover instead of a parcel shelf.

We're still inspecting the C30 for safety,



The Volvo C30 – more about style than practicality

Summer's on the way and we have eight new coupés and convertibles on test – p66

but we've found it is fitted with the seat-belt buckles we've criticised in the S80 (see below). That said, the C30's got a lot of other laudable safety kit as standard on all models (including electronic stability control and six airbags), and it recently received a five-star rating in Euro NCAP crash tests.

VERDICT We don't think it measures up to its Audi or BMW rivals overall, but is worth taking a test drive if these don't take your fancy. Trade-in values are predicted to be between 51 and 53 per cent after three years and 36,000 miles, similar to the A3 and 1 Series. Prices start from £14,750 and rise to £24,245.

AND SEAT-BELT PROBLEM MARS VOLVO'S NEW EXEC MODEL

Our Volvo S80 test car – a 2.4 D5 (185) SE Lux Geartronic with a list price of £30,380 – gave a warm first impression. But a longer drive highlighted some shortcomings.

It wasn't as quiet as we had hoped. The slightly clunky automatic transmission and low-speed turbo lag (the delay before the turbocharger kicks in) were unwelcome while crawling in traffic. And the ride was not smooth enough for a luxury car.

Volvo claims 38.7mpg for this model and the trip computer showed

S80: ride doesn't improve with speed

we were close to this with 37.0mpg – after a combination of heavy urban traffic and motorway driving. The most efficient petrol model should return 30mpg.

We expect airtight safety from Volvo but were disappointed with the S80's seat-belt buckles – they can be accidentally opened by flailing limbs in a crash because the release button isn't well recessed into the buckle. The company is

looking into our concerns. Having said that, it's likely that the S80 would receive a five-star Euro NCAP crash-test score, and electronic stability control is fitted as standard across the range.

We can't pick many holes in the practicality of the S80, which is, after all, quite a big car.

VERDICT Unfortunately, there seems to be little to really recommend the S80 over its rivals in the BMW 5 Series and Mercedes E-class, or indeed its predecessor, which represents something of a bargain thanks to steep depreciation. Prices start from £24,995.



Changes to 'Product news'

UPDATE

We've made some changes this month to 'Product news' to take account of Which?'s vastly increased testing programme of major consumer goods.

This year we will be testing more cars, televisions, digital cameras, mobile phones, MP3 players and many other big-ticket items than ever before.

We're keen to get our reports to you as soon as possible – so these pages will have more first looks and quick reports, and results will be published as soon as possible on our website at www.which.co.uk

193-284g/km
carbon emissions
for a Volvo S80
CAP MOTOR RESEARCH

129-224g/km
carbon emissions
for a Volvo C30
CAP MOTOR RESEARCH

7.5 million
pairs of unworn shoes in
wardrobes across the UK
eBAY

Our efforts to test small wind turbines face a long struggle

Green test becomes tied up in red tape

ECO POWER

We ordered a £1,498 Wind-save turbine in July last year for testing; our volunteer was ready; the house was surveyed; a fitting date was fixed; we were told that because of recent government initiatives we shouldn't need planning permission – and that's when the process was halted.

We contacted the local planning department, to be on the safe side, and were told to submit a 'Do I need planning permission?' form, along with drawings and technical data. It promised a reply within ten days.

But it was not all smooth going. Planning permission was required – and was eventually conditionally granted at the end of December.

We had to supply details of the appearance of the turbine but, more

worryingly, we were told that the turbine had to be taken down after a year unless we submitted a further application. The council said this condition was inserted because of concerns about the impact on the local environment. This was the first such application in this area and would be a test case – so any effects of the turbine could be monitored.

We are, of course, going ahead but it doesn't bode well for those looking to do this on their own. They could be throwing away nearly £1,500 if new permission is not granted a year down the line. And this doesn't match up with the government's promise to encourage this type of green technology.

A new law exempting small turbines from planning permission



Wind plans: red-tape alert

may be implemented in July this year – we'll have to wait and see. But we'll bring you results of our testing as soon as possible – unless we run into any more red tape.

A 1,000-song phone

FIRST LOOK: MOBILES CURRENTLY ON TEST

The Walkman-branded Sony Ericsson W950i 3G phone targets the music-loving business traveller.

It has a large, high-res touch-screen display, quick-charging battery and a hefty 4GB of internal memory, storing about 1,000 songs. It's also a smart-phone – a combined personal digital assistant and mobile. It's free on contract from O2, Orange, Vodafone and 3.

The Motorola Z3 RIZR is the latest incarnation of the hugely popular RAZR

phone. It's a sliding handset with a good 2Mp camera and Bluetooth headset. It's free on an O2 contract.

The Nokia 2610 may not have the extras beloved of gadget fans but it is still a great phone with excellent battery life. It's free on contract or £30 pay as you go (PAYG) from T-Mobile, £30 PAYG from Orange and about £50 Sim-free online.

For full reports of all our latest tests, see www.which.co.uk/mobilephones



On test – the Sony, the Motorola and the Nokia

Just out

Garmin Zumo 400 £369

This satnav system for motorbikes is aimed at riders on a budget. It's waterproof, with left-handed controls and glove-friendly, oversized touch-screen buttons. It has UK and Ireland maps, and points-of-interest and speed-camera info – plus three months of free updates.



Creative Xdock wireless £159

This wireless iPod docking system will stream music around your house through X-Fi wireless receivers bought separately (£69 each). Creative claims it will play back your iPod tracks at 'beyond CD quality'. It can also be linked to home-cinema systems. More at www.creative.com



Sony MP3 NW-A800

Sony's first video MP3 follows Apple's new video iPod. It has a two-inch colour screen that can be used horizontally and vertically and is less than 1cm thick. Available from high-street shops in 2GB (£120), 4GB (£150), and 8GB (£200) versions. Full results, with many more MP3s, now online and in next month's Which?.



Kodak EasyShare 5300

Kodak says this new all-in-one inkjet will revolutionise home printing, with running costs up to 50 per cent lower than those of other brands. It says a postcard-sized photo will cost just 10p. We'll be testing it to see whether it really is as cheap as Kodak claims. Available in May.

