

Portland Observer Auto Review

News and reviews on new motor vehicles

2008 Volvo C30 2.0 M The Youngster with a Playful Personality

BY KATHLEEN CARR

The all new compact C30 has the distinction of being the smallest car Volvo offers. The C30 is suited to its duty of injecting youthful enthusiasm into the stodgy Volvo family. It's a slick two-door coupe with a glass hatchback.

It is derived from the Volvo S40 platform, though 8.5 inches shorter, 320 pounds lighter and a two-door hatchback rather than a four-door sedan. In profile, it somewhat resembles a station wagon with a massive glass hatch lid so those trailing can see inside the cabin from cargo hold to dash.

The small size, however, doesn't mean it sacrifices any of Volvo's attention to safety. What is most Volvo-like about the C30 are the safety features.

There's stability control with traction control to get you moving and keep you going in the desired direction without wiggle or jiggle. And anti-lock brakes ensure you stop when and where intended.

If you still mess up, there are front and side-curtain air bags, headrests that cradle the melon in a rear impact to prevent whiplash and a special bucket seat design front and rear to keep occupants from submarining under and out of the safety belts in an impact.

As an added safeguard, the nose has a small, soft plastic beam in front of the



SPECIFICATIONS: 2.5-Liter, 5-Cylinder 227-hp @ 236 lb-ft. torque Turbocharged Engine; 6-Speed Manual transmission; 19-City 28-Highway MPG; \$27,950. MSRP

bumper to absorb crash energy and reduce injury to any pedestrian you may strike.

The C30 is new for 2008. It comes in 1.0 and 2.0 versions. On close inspection, the major difference between the two is that the 1.0 has 17-inch radials, the 2.0 18-inch radials as standard.

While small, it delivers more than a little kick thanks to its 2.5-liter, 227-horsepower, turbocharged 5-cylinder. A 6-speed manual is standard; a 5-speed automatic with manual mode is optional.

There's good power to pass and little or no noticeable turbo lag between kicking

the pedal and getting a response. Usually 5-cylinder engines aren't as smooth or quiet as a V-6, but the 2.5 was neither overly noisy nor harsh. But the mileage suffers. Fuel economy is nothing special: fuel mileage is rated at 19-city, 27-highway, and the C30 likes premium gasoline.

The C30 is energetic. You zip along the highway and into and out of tight corners and turns, but pay the price on long-distance travel. That's because it's snug with stiff seat backs, small seat bottoms and narrow side bolsters. It also comes with a dynamic chassis, which means a firmer suspension to take advantage of

the car's "playful personality" though in doing so you "may sacrifice a touch of comfort."

Oddly, pull the handle in the top of the front seats and they slide forward to provide decent access to rear seats, where you find surprisingly good leg and head room.

Lift the glass hatch lid and there's decent space for luggage or groceries. To hold the golf clubs—or more luggage and groceries—squeeze the handle on the top of the rear seats and the backs fold flat.

The C30 also is Volvo's first Custom Build vehicle. You can add stand-alone

options such as DVD navigation system (\$2,120), power moon roof (\$1,200), leather seats (\$1,200) and power driver's seat (\$450); or a climate package (\$675) with heated seats, headlamp washers and rain-sensing wipers.

Or 20 individual items such as power driver/passenger seats (\$900), headlamp washers (\$400), electronic climate control (\$250) and blind-spot information system (\$695 for cameras in the side-view mirrors detect vehicles in your blind spot and set off orange warning lights in the A-pillars along the windshield) to make the C30 all your own.

There are also 17 exterior colors, 12 interior trim packages and nine seat/carpet/floor mat colors. But for all this choice, you pay a \$300 option fee that simply allows you to customize the car and your bill.

Standard equipment includes power windows/locks/mirrors, rear-window defroster, tinted windows, AM/FM radio with single disc in-dash CD player with auxiliary input and MP3 capability and Sirius satellite radio with a year's free service.

So it's a snappy non-Volvo-like hatchback. The criticisms seem minor compared to how much is right with the C30, particularly the styling. This may be the car that finally makes Americans appreciate premium European hatchbacks. Or it may not. At least we will be given the chance to experience this entry-level Volvo that's actually pretty cool. The Volvo C30 offers a fine combination of performance, style and safety at a reasonable price before customization.

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