

Car of the Week: 2013 Volvo C30 T5 M R-Design

By Frank S. Washington,
AboutThatCar.com

DETROIT – The Volvo C30 T5 M R-Design represents a not so characteristic flare by the conservative Swedish automaker.

The two-door hatchback was small, sporty and distinctive. But not being able to completely break from its legendary pragmatism, Volvo's C30 could carry four adults comfortably, even though the car looked like it would have trouble getting anything bigger than a couple of bags of groceries in the back seat.

A sort of back to front explanation of the nameplate begins with R-Design. Volvo needs new products. What keeps the automaker relevant in today's market is that its current lineup is very good.

Still, to buy some time and to keep itself in a competitive position Volvo is relying more on Polestar, the Swedish racing shop that has been tuning Volvos since 1996 to add new and zestier products to its lineup.

R-Design Volvos have been tuned by Polestar. In the case of the C30, that means the 2.5-liter five cylinder 227 horsepower engine has been bumped up to 250 horsepower. What Volvo calls "Rebel Blue Paint" is a love it or hate it hue but it gets as much attention as a red Ferrari. And the black alloy wheels gave the car a race track raw look.

It is more than appearance. The C30 weighed about 3,200 lbs. and it had a six-speed manual transmission. The car was quick; with the six-speed manual gearbox

torque in the form of power was on demand from any speed and during long shifts up the gear ratio, the front-wheel-drive hatchback could easily get up to 100 mph with oomph to spare.

But the R-Design was more than just the engine enhancement by Polestar. The car had 18-inch alloy wheels, rather than the normal tread which is one inch smaller. The sport chassis was of course firm but the strut and multilink suspension system was sophisticatedly tuned in that the ride was not harsh.

The R-Design body kit included front and rear spoilers, an R-Design grille with matte silver surround and polished dual exhaust tips.

Inside, the C30 was just as distinctive as its blue paint job on the outside. The seats were French-stitched two-toned black and white leather with R-Design emblazoned on them. The pedals were inlaid with aluminum and the flat-bottomed steering wheel had the R-Design logo in the center.

Like all Volvos, the C30 featured the Swedish automaker's floating center stack; an innovation it never gets enough credit for. The only thing questionable about the C30 was the navigation screen, or more precisely the navigation system.

The screen folded flat on top of the dash. That was understandable, there was really no place else to incorporate a navigation screen in the C30 because of a lack of space. But there was a remote to operate it.

Just the concept of trying to operate the navigation system, whatever it would do while the car was in motion, with a remote



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control was daunting. It would be like texting while driving. For Volvo, the notion was certainly a departure for a brand that has assiduously cultivated its reputation for safety around the world.

To make the navigation system inoperable while the car was moving might be a fix to consider. Operating elements of the C30's navigation while the vehicle was in motion

is not the smart thing to do. Still, everything else about Volvo's departure from the traditional with this two-door hatchback was a good thing.

The navigation system was part of the \$5,000 "Platinum" option package that included satellite radio, a premium sound system, moonroof, power passenger seat and adaptive Xenon headlights.

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