

VOLVO S60

# Alternative therapy

Want to break your 3-series, A4 or C-Class addiction? Then Volvo may have the remedy: a powerful dose of new S60. By **Keith Adams**

**L**IKE ALL RECENT Volvos, the new S60 looks good, but it stands out because of a couple of firsts: it's the first Volvo model to drop the diesel option, and it's the first to get the new Polestar Engineered treatment.

European specs for the 3-series/A4/C-Class rival are yet to be finalised, but we know the initial engine for the UK will be the 245bhp T5. Later, it will be joined by 187bhp T4, T6 Twin Engine and T8 Twin Engine plug-in variants, plus a Polestar Engineered version.

We've driven the T8 Polestar Engineered, which is set to become the S60's halo model. It will be followed by Polestar versions of the V60 and XC60.

Polestar as a sub-brand is attempting the tricky balancing act of being about both high performance and electrification. And, adding to the complication, almost as quickly as Volvo engineers tell you about the platform's brilliance when it comes to accommodating the Polestar's hybrid drivetrain, they'll rush to tell you that this is no BMW M3/Mercedes-AMG C43 challenger.

But at £50k-plus, it will end up on the same shopping lists, and in many ways shouldn't disappoint. Inside, it

stands out from the pack thanks to cool use of wood and that 9.0-inch all-encompassing portrait-format Sensus infotainment system.

It's the Polestar upgrades that make this performance version so intriguing. It combines Öhlins dampers, a strut brace, a 12mm drop in ride height and an increase in spring rate. There's also a 14bhp jump in power, and a recalibrated Power driving mode to give you sharper throttle response and more driver-focused gearchange settings.

It's usefully quick, with a 0-62mph time of 4.4 seconds, but it disguises this acceleration a little too well, never feeling electrifyingly fast. Nor does it have a rorty soundtrack, sounding instead like a humdrum hybrid four-pot.

The plug-in hybrid might only give the Polestar 21 miles of EV driving, but it delivers instant throttle response in the mid-range, making it an excellent fussy-

## VOLVO S60 T8 POLESTAR

► **Price** £51,000 (est) ► **Engine** 1968cc 16v turbo and supercharged 4-cyl plug-in hybrid, 400bhp @ 5500rpm, 494lb ft @ 5500rpm ► **Transmission** 8-speed auto, all-wheel drive ► **Performance** 4.4sec 0-62mph, 155mph ► **Weight** 1900kg (est) ► **On sale** Early 2019

## LOVE

Gorgeous styling, non-conformist image, brilliant damping

## HATE

Uncommunicative steering, inconsistent brakes, overweight

## VERDICT

Likeable left-field performance saloon is more cruiser than bruiser

★★★★★



R-Design shown here gets the same 9in display as the Polestar, but no Öhlins dampers

free means of covering ground quickly.

The ride is firm, but thanks to those sublime dampers it seldom gets ruffled by rough roads. Yes, it can pitter-patter on motorway expansion joints, but the excellent damping and body control round off all major irregularities.

When the roads get twistier, it gives the driver real confidence to lean on it. Turn-in is progressive, and understeer is limited. It's very difficult to get things out of shape without severe provocation. It still feels heavy (around 1900kg is our educated guess) but is far less leaden than a standard S60.

Overall, the S60 Polestar is a characterful fast saloon, if a little confusing. It's not fast enough to challenge the M3, nor as charismatic as the C43. The Audi S5 probably has it beaten as an all-rounder too. But the S60 Polestar is good beyond expectations, which is excellent news for buyers wanting a leftfield alternative. Choose one and you'll be driving an interesting car, not making a mistake.



The chassis is clever, but we want more drama

## BMW M850i

# Too sane

**T**HE NUMBER EIGHT is only applied to the posher, pricier, quirkiest realms of BMW's portfolio – Z8, i8, the original '89-'96 8-series coupe. Now it's back.

We got to grips with a pre-production car in the USA for our October cover story, but the reincarnated 8-series is now officially go for launch in Europe, as both an 840d (3.0 straight-six turbodiesel) and the M850i (twin-turbo 4.4 V8 petrol) tested here.

It will be available in three shapes: two-door coupe, convertible and four-door Gran Coupe. All-out M8 variants will be along next year.

Power flows primarily to the rear wheels, the fronts being called into play when necessary. Combined with some chassis tricksiness, including standard electronically controlled dampers, rear e-diff, four-wheel steering and optional active anti-roll bars, the result is a car that moves quicker, stops better and handles more nimbly than an object approaching 1.9 tonnes has any right to.

With all of the tech primed for battle in Sport and Sport+ modes, the M850i is a grippy, responsive car with a neutral balance erring towards safe, friendly oversteer. And with its neck wound in for Comfort mode it's a waftomatic cruiser.

Thing is, the overall mix errs far more towards refined, easy-going luxury than sporting GT. Which is fine, but BMW describes the 8-series as a sports car, and it carries a serious price tag: £76k for the 840d and £100k for the M850i, before options. For me there's not quite enough drama, enough involvement, enough sense of occasion in return. Regardless, the days of big coupes with big engines are numbered, and this is one of the breed's most talented exponents.

**JAMES TAYLOR**

## BMW M850i

► **Price** £100,045  
► **Engine** 4395cc 32v twin-turbo V8, 523bhp @ 5500rpm, 553lb ft @ 1800rpm  
► **Transmission** 8-speed auto, rear e-diff, all-wheel drive  
► **Performance** 3.7sec 0-62mph, 155mph, 29.1mpg, 221g/km CO2  
► **Weight** 1890kg  
► **On sale** December

**VERDICT** Impressive, but perhaps a bit too sensible for its own good  
★★★★★

## MERCEDES-AMG E53 COUPE

# Don't think, just drive

Mercedes' line-up is automotive string theory. But this one makes perfect sense. By **Colin Overland**

**T**HE NEW E53 Coupe uses an engine that's slowly spreading across the upper reaches of the Daimler empire. It has a body that looks like both the C-Class and S-Class Coupes and also resembles the CLS (which is available with the same 53 engine). Eh? Mercedes' model line-up is undoubtedly a tortuous Venn diagram – but on the road the E53 Coupe is an oasis of sanity.

It sounds a bit sweeping, but the 53 engine is the perfect match for the E-Class Coupe body. It's much less sporty in feel than AMG's 43 V6 and 63 V8, but has a glorious smooth torquiness that's utterly in keeping with the cruiser/GT vibe that the E Coupe embodies. If you flick the C, and slide all the self-driving controls up to max in the S, you simply guide the E.

The engine is a petrol inline-six with a turbocharger supplemented by an electric compressor, which kicks in at zero revs in the way a fume-driven turbo can't. As well as a conventional 12v electrical system, the 53 has a 48v system, at the heart of which is a starter-generator located between the engine and transmission.

This multi-tasking EQ Boost system can capture surplus braking energy, it can power functions such as the water pump, it runs the engine stop-start system in traffic, and it's behind Cruise mode, where the engine can briefly cut out and restart at speed. The aim is to

make the powerplant cleaner and less thirsty but no less fun.

It's a fantastically well chosen engine for the E Coupe (which is also available with a variety of other perfectly good petrol and diesel units). The combination creates a cruiser that can corner, pamper and excite depending on how the mood takes you.

And although you might think the S-Class Coupe is the same sort of thing but more luxurious, it in reality feels much, much bigger and less nimble. The C-Class Coupe, in contrast, is all about the agility but loses the luxury. The E53 does a different job to the CLS too – the CLS is bigger and infinitely superior for those who regularly carry adult passengers, because its rear doors make access so much easier, even though the E Coupe's rear seats are plenty roomy enough once you're in.

But ultimately it's the engine that distinguishes the E53. So much useful power, instantly available, delivered without fuss, in perfect harmony with chassis and electrics. Lovely.

## MERCEDES-AMG E53

► **Price** £64,790 ► **Engine** 2999cc 24v turbo 6-cyl, 429bhp @ 6100rpm, 384lb ft @ 1800rpm ► **Transmission** 9-speed auto, all-wheel drive ► **Performance** 4.4sec 0-62mph, 155mph, 32.5mpg, 203g/km CO2 ► **Weight** 1970kg ► **On sale** Now  
► **Rating** ★★★★★

**VERDICT** Low-key looks but glorious appliance of tech



A perfect blend of engine and body heads off to obliterate some Venn diagrams