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Secret Weapon

Practical, comfortable and manually shiftable, the V70 R wagon is the ultimate sleeper

By Jeff Zurschmeide



If you can deal with cars with more than 100,000 miles on the clock, you can score a V70 R for under \$10k

There's a certain kind of person who's drawn to Volvo station wagons. Typically, that person is a driving enthusiast who loves the practical applications of a wagon, affording all the cargo capacity of an SUV along with the performance and handling of a passenger car. The "long roof" cognoscenti smile and nod knowingly, hoping that their secret stays on the down-low, helping to keep these cars affordable.

There have been a number of performance station wagons through automotive history. The Big Three of old put some potent hardware into those old Country Squires and Vista Cruisers, but the Europeans have had their say as well. Many cult-favorite BMWs, Benzes and Audis have been wagons. But Volvo stands alone in its commitment to the station-wagon breed. For most of the past 50 years, however, the Volvo wagon was subject to a lot of snide mockery. Safety was the cornerstone of the company's marketing, not fun.

Volvo started boosting the performance of its wagons in the mid-'90s with the 850 T5-R, with 243 horsepower and an available 5-speed manual gearbox, which was enough to post a 0–60 mph time of about six seconds. The 850R and the 850 AWD followed before Volvo changed its naming scheme with the V70 R. The first-generation V70 R was made from 1997 to 2000 and was only offered here with an automatic transmission until 2000, when a manual became belatedly available.

The one you want

The V70 R reached its full flower with the second generation, released in 2003 as a 2004 model. This second generation received an evolved version of Volvo's 2.5-liter 5-cylinder, 4-valve turbocharged engine good for 296 horsepower and up to 295 lb-ft of torque (258 lb-ft for automatics).

That power was passed through a 6-speed manual or a 5-speed (and later a 6-speed) automatic, and then to a Haldex all-wheel-drive system. The V70 R mainly operates as a front-drive car with a 90/10 split under normal conditions but ramps up the rear bias quickly under hard acceleration or wheel slip. The second-generation V70 R would hit 60 mph in 5.8 seconds on its way to a top speed governed at 155 mph.

The real magic of the V70 R was in the suspension. Volvo partnered with Monroe and Öhlins to develop a driver-controlled active-damping system called "4C" for Continuously Controlled Chassis Concept. The computer-controlled system adjusts for conditions 500 times per second and helps control dive, squat and body roll. Additionally, the



2007 Volvo V70 R with 84,000 miles, sold for \$12,700 on Cars & Bids in May 2021

driver can select three self-explanatory levels of damping, namely Comfort, Sport and Advanced Sport. Current owners report that the system, when properly maintained, is capable of turning the V70 R from a cushy family wagon into an effective track weapon. Speaking of which, take a peek behind the R-branded five-spoke wheels and you'll find four-pot fixed-caliper Brembo brakes at the front.

One more high point: Owners report that the V70 R seats may in fact be the most comfortable chairs ever put into a performance car. That's happy news if you have ever succumbed to the temptation to buy a "performance seat option" sight unseen and butt un-sat, as it were.

The bad stuff

Volvo produced the second-generation V70 R (known as P2 by the initiated) for four years, bringing just over 3,400 to America in that time. Of those, about two-thirds are thought to be equipped with the automatic transmission, so manuals can be harder to find.

The known weak points on the V70 R start with cracked cylinder walls, presumably due to the larger turbocharger dialed up to 15.2 psi of peak boost. Volvo replaced many of these engines under warranty, so it's been an issue from the beginning. The extra power also has a tendency to wear out the bevel gears in the front differential. Finally, the 4C shocks don't last forever, and as an active system they're predictably expensive to replace.

Bearing in mind these potentially expensive weak points, investing in a comprehensive pre-purchase inspection by an experienced Volvo shop should be considered a requirement before spending any money in a V70 R. The cost of a cracked block or stripped bevel gear can easily outrun any savings on a cheap example.

An affordable, low-key classic

Second-gen V70 R examples cross the block at Bring a Trailer at a pretty steady rate of one or two each month. Most of these trade hands

in the mid-teens, with manual-transmission cars bringing a premium of several thousand dollars.

There have been some outliers bid up to the near-\$40k area with extremely low miles and excellent condition. Though it bears noting that most of these sales happened in the midst of 2021, when the market was more exuberant than it is today. The most recent outlier was an ultra-clean example with 39k miles sold for \$37,800 in May 2022.



Of note is a solid 6-speed example with 85k miles showing sold on BaT for \$21,525 in October 2020; the same car came back to the site in February of this year with 91k miles and ended up unsold at only \$17,750. That price difference likely reflects the fluctuating used-car market rather than any waning interest in the model.

If you want to get into a V70 R at a really affordable price, cars with more than 100,000 miles on the clock are readily available under \$10,000. Another tip for deal-seekers: Add Volvo forums to your search, as plenty of serviceable cars with higher mileage change hands among marque enthusiasts.

Get a good V70 R and you'll be joining an exclusive fraternity of those who know. ♦

DETAILS

Years produced: 2004-07 (U.S.)

Number produced: 3,407 (U.S.)

Price when new: \$38,325

Pros: 6-speed manual, turbo power, active suspension, comfortable performance

Cons: Potential for expensive engine, drivetrain and suspension repairs

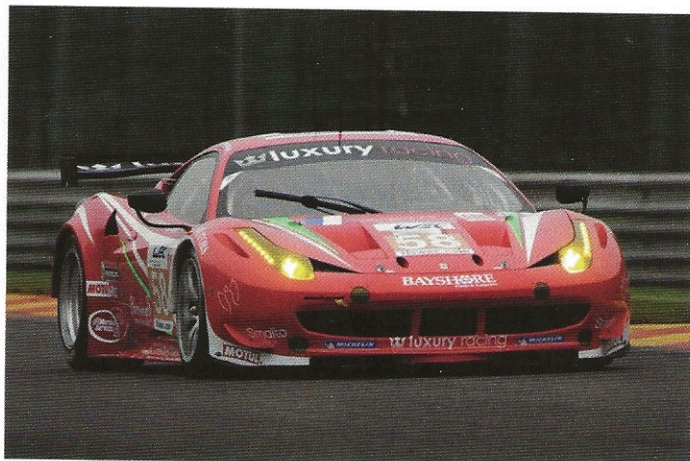
Best place to drive one: To the ski lodge in the winter, waving at stuck 4WD pickup trucks

Worst place to drive one: To the repair shop with zero compression in one cylinder

A typical owner is: Utterly fanatical about Volvo wagons (and for good reason)



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