

2006 Volvo S60 R AWD – A Mini Review
By: David Ray for www.hookedondriving.com

Volvo – a name synonymous with safety, longevity and practicality. The perfect Berkeley professor (tenured, off course) sedan. If this perception has any basis in fact, what is that electric blue flying brick that is parked in the driveway? The S60R AWD is Volvo's answer to the M machines from BMW, the V machines of GM, and the AMG packages from Mercedes. While Volvo definitely holds a different market niche and image than these aforementioned brands, any SCCA member in good standing should congratulate Volvo for the commitment of resources to build this car. Consider this: A very comfortable four door sedan with a 300HP/295ft lbs of torque 5 cylinder, twin turbo engine, Brembo brakes, a three-setting variable sport suspension, heated leather seats, a 6 speed geartronic transmission, all-wheel drive, complete aero kit with cow-catcher fascia and rear wing, 18" Pegasus alloy wheels, a Dolby surround sound 6 disc changer – all for the tidy sum of \$44,355. One could drop this kind of money on a nicely equipped BMW 3 series. This is a lot of car/bang for the buck. It really was a bit of a shock to encounter a Volvo with this type of persona – the car gets looks. This is not a car that pursues the twenty somethings of the world. On the other hand, Volvo is a well-respected brand, why shouldn't they doll up one of their best sedans for the car nut set?



So let's take the S60 R through its paces and see how it stacks up in the wonderfully crowded world of sport sedans. The interior as you would imagine is very comfy for five. The leather is supple, and the sport seats are legitimately more aggressive than standard buckets, but would be judged on the soft side of sporty. A cruise around town demonstrates a very capable and pleasant daily driver. Once you're over 3000 RPM, the 5 banger turbo has a nice steady pull without a noticeable lag, due, we're sure to the twin turbos spooling quicker than one big turbo would have. Transversely mounted with an aluminum head and block, this 2.5 liter unit optimizes power and torque via "dual wide range" variable valve timing. However, we were surprised to hear the whine that this engine puts out. And from this point forward, we had some discoveries that slowed us in our normal falling in love process with four-wheeled things called cars. Taking the S60 R out for a jaunt on the freeway, we were truly shocked to discover the suspension bottoming through dips on Highway 680. The suspension should be cool, with three

shock settings that have an immediate and real impact on ride. Except we didn't really like any of the settings. The "comfort" setting had us bottoming out, the "sport" took us to a mildly harsh ride, and the "advanced" setting was way too stiff for a car of this type. Then we snuck away for some "performance" driving and found a quiet spot for an acceleration test. With all-wheel drive and a small displacement turbo, we didn't expect any real drama off the line, and the Volvo didn't surprise us – there wasn't any. But, once we got rolling, this engine once again felt all of 300 horses and 295 torques – but wait there's more. The 6-speed geartronic, in the sport mode, shifted deftly by the test driver, was in another time zone. As the car accelerated toward a shift point, we discovered that it took 600-700 RPM's for the gearbox to react to an urgent need to shift. More than once, we shifted 200 RPM's before redline and hit the rev limiter as the geartronic was on break and hadn't done the job. After several attempts at full-throttle acceleration, we confirmed the need to execute the shift command at 6200 RPM's to avoid hitting the rev limiter at 7000 RPM's. More encouraging was the news that the car is available with a 6 speed manual that would surely inject a major dose of "R" back into the R. Our quick handling loop netted a mixed opinion. Don't push, don't tell is our policy here. The car is fine driven mildly through the twisties which is what most folks do anyway.

Being truly hooked on driving, and a person who loves most cars he comes near, this was a sad story. Volvo deserves a lot of credit for going after the performance market. I fear though, that the result is an effort to prevent current customers from wandering to sexier competitors – and they may have done the job. While the S60 R is certainly a pleasant car to operate, it simply lacks in too many areas to compete in the sport sedan market with substantial credibility. Re-map the transmission, solve the engine whine, and take another run at adjustable shock settings and this car could be a contender. But I'm certain that Volvo ALMS race driver Derek Bell would concur – the 2006 S60 R AWD needs another spin through the R & D department, and we look forward to testing the results.