The new Volvo XC60 and Audi Q5 have created some much-needed competition for BMW’s X3 in the small luxury Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) market.
The need to check carefully the specific equipment and options for each model is a warning to all buyers in this segment. Multiple steps in the pricing of optional features, random inclusions or the packaging of desirable options can not only confuse the buyer but also add significantly to the price.

BMW and Audi also have 2.0-litre models in their ranges that record less than 7.0-litres/100 km in government fuel consumption testing and so the luxury car tax, which usually kicks in at $57,000, is lifted to $75,000. This adds further confusion to pricing, with BMW listing two prices for accessories, depending on the vehicle incurring the luxury tax.

**VALUE FOR MONEY**

As might be expected on vehicles of this price, the standard features list is extensive.

But there are subtle differences: Only the Q5 has Datadot security as standard, while XC60 alone boasts memory with its driver’s seat. X3 can claim front parking sensors, but is the odd one out with just a single-disc CD player. Volvo charges for bluetooth capability, yet makes bi-xenon headlights standard.

Then there’s the vexed question of depreciation. According to Glass’s Guide, all share a 78 percent residual after one year. After that, the situation is less clear with the guide having no figures for the XC60. However, going by the sibling XC70, the Volvo could take a deeper dive (65 percent after two years) compared with 72 for the BMW and 71 for the Audi.

Naturally, it’s advantage X3 and Q5 diesels in terms of fuel economy. Going by the official ADR figures, the Audi sips the least at 7.5-litres/100 km, 0.2 better than the BMW. The Volvo trails at 11.9. All come with a 3 year/unlimited km warranty. Volvo and Audi specify 12 month/15,000 km service intervals, while BMW has condition based servicing.

The latter prevents a direct comparison of scheduled servicing costs between the three. However, in tallying our standard basket of consumable parts (e.g., air filter, front brake pads and rotors) and comprehensive insurance through RACQ Insurance, the Audi is a couple of hundred dollars cheaper than the Volvo and nearly $500 the better of the BMW

**DESIGN & FUNCTION**

It’s inside the X3, by way of features, practicality and space, that the car is showing its age.

The cabin is considerably narrower than its rivals, door access front and rear is a little tighter, and there is no seatbelt height or headrest travel adjustment. While the front sports seats give good support and a cushion extension, rear seat occupants will find less padding or seat shaping as well as less leg space and no ventilation outlets. Child seat anchorages are

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**AUDI Q5 3.0TDI**

**RRP:** $71,900

**SAFETY:** Anti-lock brakes, electronic brake distribution, brake assist, traction control, electronic stability control, seatbelt pretensioners and dual front, front side and curtain airbags.

**KEY FEATURES:** Climate control (3 zone), CD player (6 in dash), alloy wheels, cruise control, trip computer, power windows, power driver’s seat height adjustment, rain-sensing wipers, steering wheel-mounted audio controls, leather upholstery.

**ENGINE:** 3.0-litre, 24-valve, 176 kW, V6

**FUEL (average economy, as tested):** Diesel, 9.7 litres/100 km

**CRASH RATING:**

**EMISSIONS RATING:**

**STAR RATING (OUT OF 5):** ★★★★★
also not all that conveniently located on the cargo area floor.

The load area is the tightest and most restrictive of this group, although sturdy floor-mounted cargo tie-down rails and a dual-action cargo cover and restraining blind are a plus.

The X3 has the lowest towing capacity in this group and is one BMW that doesn’t have the convenience of run-flat tyres, relying instead on a skinny space-saver.

With the XC60, Volvo has cemented its safety reputation by adding the City Safety auto braking system to an already-comprehensive standard safety kit. At up to 30 km/h, City Safety uses a sensor to detect vehicles in front and applies the brakes if an impending impact is detected. An additional raft of driver safety technologies is also included.

Inside, XC60 is spacious and accommodating, with good design features and practicality. There’s excellent seat comfort and support, plus electric adjustment with memory settings for the driver.

Likewise, rear seat passengers enjoy good seat design and plenty of leg support and headroom. Volvo is noted for its fold-out child seats and well-located anchorage points on the seat back, and it’s this attention to detail – including rear vents, armrests, two-position cargo barrier and demisting side glass – that makes a difference.

Rear seats fold flat to reveal a large load space, the best of these three and practical to use. A 2000 kg towing capacity is useful; a space-saver spare wheel is not.

Audi has a well-earned reputation for build quality and presentation, particularly in its use of first-class trim materials. Yet the Q5 can be frustrating and also distracting for drivers trying to identify and use some hidden switches.

An electrically adjusted driver’s seat and lumbar adjustment for both front seat occupants is standard on the 3.0 TDI, but their shaping is ordinary and some drivers complained of hunched shoulders. Rear seats can be tilted.

Vision difficulties were also more obvious in the Q5 with the odd curious dilemma, such as massive rear-view mirrors that block forward corner vision.

**ON THE ROAD**

With the strong pulling power of 500 Nm of torque delivered under 2000 rpm, BMW’s in-line, six-cylinder turbo-diesel provides effortless performance and is aided in its quietness and flexibility by a smooth six-speed auto and relatively light kerb weight.

Engine tweaks have also cut the government fuel consumption figure from 8.1 to 7.7-litres/100 km, however our testing, which including some off-roading, returned 10.3. Handling agility and steering...
accuracy are outstanding for this type of vehicle, and despite the decidedly firmer, optional M suspension that our test car came with, it rides nicely even over corrugated dirt roads.

Occupants face BMW’s typically smart dash and steering wheel presentation, despite the odd hard-to-read instrument calibration, but the manually adjusted sports seat is awkward and the lack of lumbar control is disappointing.

The XC60 gives nothing away to the BMW or Audi in mechanical refinement, performance or handling.

A well-matched, six-speed automatic with manual shift mode adds to the driving enjoyment on country roads where more power is delivered higher in the rev range. On the flip side, 400 Nm of torque from just 1500 rpm also ensures good flexibility and pulling power around town.

Petrol engines will never match an equivalent diesel for economy, and our overall average of 15-litres/100 km for the T6 looks ordinary against the diesel averages.

Adding to the T6 performance and its ability to cover ground effortlessly is an excellent ride and handling package. XC60 rides as well as any luxury car over poor roads and yet feels solid and surefooted, without that cumbersome feeling often associated with 4WDs.

Diesel engine refinement is an Audi hallmark, and this turbo V6 delivers more power and the same stump-pulling 500 Nm of torque as the BMW, yet with better fuel efficiency, despite its higher kerb weight.

Ride on all roads is excellent, provided you choose Sport mode for firm control or Comfort for insulation, because the in-between Auto setting is vague.

While the Audi has the longest wheelbase, it falls short of the Volvo in seating space and, in some respects, load versatility.

Child seat anchorages are also handily located on the seat back, but the need for a $1065 powered tailgate is questionable. A higher towing capacity adds to its versatility, while the space-saver spare is the type that needs inflating.

CONCLUSION

BMW X3 established this market, but while it retains its appealing performance and driving dynamics, it’s now cramped in load area and pricey. Audi’s Q5 is a better proposition for variable load use, while matching BMW’s performance and trumping its fuel economy. Regrettably, the Q5 looks and feels bulky.

XC60 is arguably the best Volvo for some time, with a no-fuss design and stunning functionality. Comfort, space and practicality combine with a new benchmark in safety.

BMW X3 3.0D

RRP: $76,996
SAFETY: Anti-lock brakes, electronic brake distribution, brake assist, traction control, electronic stability control, seatbelt pretensioners and dual front, front side and curtain airbags.
KEY FEATURES: Climate control, CD player, alloy wheels, cruise control, trip computer, power windows, power driver’s seat height adjustment, rain-sensing wipers, steering wheel-mounted audio controls, leather upholstery.
ENGINE: 3.0-litre, 24-valve, 160 kW, in-line 6-cylinder
FUEL (average economy, as tested): Diesel, 10.3 litres/100 km
CRASH RATING: ★★★★
EMISSIONS RATING: ★★★
STAR RATING (OUT OF 5): ★★★☆☆