

SUZUKI VITARA

By Jim Mc Cauley

Suzuki has launched the latest evolution in the 25 year reign of the Vitara, the compact SUV that has earned high acclaim for its easy to manage dimensions, good on-road performance and genuine off-road capability. The new model is sleeker and bolder in appearance than its predecessor adding an assertive presence with the new wide corporate grille and strong side character lines which add visual strength as they rise over the rear wheel arches before sweeping around into the rear end.



Underneath is a choice of two 1.6 litre engines, one petrol and one diesel to satisfy market preferences. Appreciating that while some customers require this style of vehicle, not all have the need for 4-wheel drive, so the range is offered in both 2-wheel drive and all-wheel drive options.

Petrol and diesel engine variants were driven at the vehicle's UK launch, confirming the performance and economy advances over the outgoing models. Performance-wise, while both engines have the same 120 PS output, the diesel has the obvious torque advantage for in-gear response in the higher gears although both engines record a similar time from rest to 62

mph of 11.5 seconds in the 2-wheel drive models with the diesel just pipping the petrol in all-wheel drive by 0.6 of a second at 11.4 seconds.

On-road, and both engines are extremely refined with high build quality adding to the much improved feel of the vehicles, particularly so in the range topping SZ5 models which feature the optional ALLGRIP 4-wheel drive system. Both vehicles ride very well, offering good passenger comfort, but also providing good cornering support, allowing the driver to maintain excellent pace and make the most of the 1.6 litre engines. The petrol drives through its standard 5-speed gearbox while the diesel has a more precisely engaging 6-speed 'box, both set of ratios well chosen for the engine outputs. Although the diesel has a characteristic diesel tick-over, it gathers refinement as the revs increase and both engines are quiet on the open road.

Inside, and the designers have opted for harder finished mouldings for practicality and longevity, while wide opening doors and excellent rear cabin room add to the attraction of the vehicle as does

the generous 375 litre boot. Overall image is also helped by a new range of vibrant colours adding to the vehicle's youthful appeal.

While the 2-wheel drive models are available in the traditional Suzuki trims of SZ4 and SZ-T, all-wheel drive is only offered as an option in SZ5 trim, making this the flagship model in both engine variants.

Suzuki's ALLGRIP system debuted in their S-CROSS models and works by distributing the torque to the rear wheels if it detects wheel spin at the front. This is the default response in 'Auto' mode, but 'Sport' and 'Snow' modes are also available, increasing the involvement of all-wheel drive in the 'Sport' setting and moving it into permanent all-wheel drive when the 'Snow' setting is selected. The ALLGRIP models also feature Hill Descent Control which automatically restricts speed on steep descents to allow the driver to maintain full control and concentrate on steering the vehicle safely. Hill Hold Control, which prevents the vehicle from rolling back on hill starts, is standard on all models.



On the economy and environmental fronts, both vehicles do extremely well with CO2 emissions as low as 123 gms/km for the 2-wheel drive petrol model and just 106 gms/km for the equivalent diesel. The ALLGRIP equipped vehicles are 130 and 111 gms/km respectively. The official combined fuel consumption for the 2-wheel drive petrol model is 53.3 mpg while for the diesel it is 70.6 mpg. There is a marginal penalty of around 3 mpg for the ALLGRIP vehicles.

Equipment-wise, the new Vitara comes comprehensively equipped across the ranges with seven airbags fitted as standard as well as Electronic Stability Program, speed limiter and tyre pressure monitoring system. Also standard are DAB radio, Bluetooth connectivity, alloys, automatic air conditioning, electrically heated and powered door mirrors, and all-round electric windows. At the top end in SZ5 specification, the models get Radar Brake Support system, Adaptive Cruise Control, LED projector headlights and double sliding panoramic sunroof in addition to a range of other upgrades.

Overall, the latest evolution of the Vitara SUV significantly raises the image of the model in terms of design and performance, and will enhance Suzuki's expanding market in the UK. The range opens with the 1.6 litre petrol model at £13,999 with the diesel range opening at £16,999 at a higher specification level than the petrol. The range-topping ALLGRIP vehicles are priced at £19,799 for the petrol and £21,299 for the diesel. All models have the maximum 5-star EuroNCAP award and are covered by Suzuki's comprehensive 3-year / 60,000 mile warranty.