

## First Drive: the new Suzuki Baleno

by Ian Lynas



Suzuki is now the number one premium brand in the UK; success due to delivering well specified, value for money vehicles and that trend continues with the launch of the new Baleno. Northern Ireland was the chosen location for the UK launch which also included a number of journalists from the Republic of Ireland and South Africa. The Baleno enters the busy B segment of the market and its key points are a practical means of transport with intelligent use of space and the employment of an impressive new engine which no doubt will find its way

into future models from Suzuki. The main rivals for the new Suzuki are the Skoda Fabia and the Hyundai i20.

So why buy this Suzuki, value for money and it is far from being a budget offering as it comes with a high specification and it offers excellent economy which is a key factor for most drivers.

According to a Suzuki spokesperson sales for their new offering will mainly be to the private sector, they were quoting 80% at the launch HQ in the Culloden Hotel.

Regarding the value for money factor the Baleno beats its key competitors on price and indications are that the residual value will be higher.

Great when a car manufacturer does not confuse everyone with an array of trim levels; with Baleno you have the choice of two, SZ-T and SZ5 and sales are likely to favour the SZ-T as it is expected to account for 50-60%.

The focal point re power is the impressive new one litre, three cylinder 111bhp engine, available on the SZ-T with the five speed manual transmission only, move to the SZ-5 and you can opt for a six speed automatic transmission.

Performance from this new Boosterjet engine is acceptable in its class with rest to 62mph taking just proud of 11 seconds and a top speed of 124mph (manual transmission).

New to Suzuki is what they call a mild hybrid, using a 1.2 petrol engine and an integrated starter generator, you





get the advantage of a low emission figure of 94g/km and the possibility of 70mpg plus. I had the opportunity to try both engine configurations and if it is performance you desire, then choose the one litre Boosterjet.

I am not writing the SHVS combination off, I see a place for it where a driver does the bulk of his or her motoring in an urban environment.

There is little doubt that we are going to hear a lot more regarding Suzuki and hybrid technology in the not too distant future.

Style wise the Baleno is not going to collect any motoring Oscars, but it is purposeful with clean lines, a design which majors rather on the practical rather than style.

Move to the comfy interior and surprise surprise both models get sat nav, Bluetooth and air con as standard while Radar Brake Support and Adaptive Cruise Control are standard on the SZ-5.

All versions of Baleno are equipped with six airbags.

Over well known roads in County Down the new Suzuki delivered a comfy ride with good roadholding.

Suzuki has gained a global recognition for producing small cars, their first was the Suzulight back in 1955, and the Baleno is a far cry from that early offering and one which will appeal to many. Now to the all important pricing, SZ-T £12,999 and SZ5 £13,999.

The SVHS hybrid adds just £500 and where it is possible to have the automatic transmission, £1,350.

In order to bring the new Baleno to within reach of a bigger audience, there are a number of very affordable PCPs.

In conclusion, the Baleno ticks a lot of boxes and you have the reassurance of a brand known for reliability.



driven May 2016