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Latest Suzuki Jimny – Road Test

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A joyful, straightforward and very capable machine...

...test-driven by Kim Henson.

Deliberately and uncompromisingly 'square' in profile, and immediately recognisable as a Jimny, Suzuki's latest incarnation of their popular compact all wheel drive machine has already become regarded as a classic design in its own time.

Just like its predecessors (dating back to 1970, when the LJ10 or original Jimny made its debut), the latest and fourth generation Jimny represents a masterstroke in terms of individualistic design and possessing dynamic capabilities (especially in off-road use) that



have to be experienced to be believed.

By contrast with the contemporary four wheel drive offerings from most manufacturers, most of which are 'soft roaders', the Jimny is an extremely capable vehicle in the most difficult types of terrain, as well as in normal driving on tarmac.

Yet many buyers are tempted just by the model's stand-out retro styling, that appeals to people of all ages and which endeared it to many during my week-long spell with a range-topping SZ5 version.





TWO VARIANTS

The Jimny model line-up could hardly be more straightforward...

For a start all variants are powered by a longitudinally-mounted 1.5 litre four cylinder petrol engine, developing 101 bhp plus 130 Nm (95 lb.ft) of torque, which is delivered at 4,000 rpm. The motor is smaller and lighter than its 1.3 litre processor, but delivers greater power across the rev range, and provides strong torque at low engine speeds – useful both on the road and in ‘off the tarmac’ motoring.



The SZ4 costs £15,499, whereas the more comprehensively equipped and range-topping



SZ5 weighs in at £17,999 for the five speed manual version, plus an extra £1,000 for those favouring four speed automatic transmission. Our SZ5 test car came with 'Dual Tone' paintwork, adding £650 to the price, which therefore totalled £18,649.

By comparison with the SZ4, which already comes as standard with a variety of modern safety and convenience aids (including, for example, hill descent control, hill hold control, dual sensor brake support and a lane departure warning system), the SZ5 specification level adds such niceties as a navigation system, aluminium alloy road wheels, heated front seats, cruise control with speed limiter and 'privacy' type rear glass.



A full size spare wheel, bolted to the side-opening rear door, comes as standard with all Jimnys.



OFF-ROAD ABILITY

When Suzuki developed the latest Jimny, the firm's engineers deliberately built-in the tough character and inherently impressive off-road credentials of the three previous generations. So a separate and substantial ladder type chassis frame, three link rigid axle coil spring suspension and a 'Pro' (professional) level four wheel drive system ('ALLGRIP'), incorporating a low ratio transfer box, were all features of the new model. In addition, the newcomer was endowed with high ground clearance, and the vehicle was designed to tackle unusually steep/high obstacles without ground contact occurring at the front and rear of the chassis and bodywork.





A tough chassis designed with off-road use in mind.

In normal driving on tarmac, the transmission runs in '2H' mode, i.e. two wheel drive high ratio, with the rear wheels only being driven. However, '4H' (four wheel drive high ratio) can be used when road and weather conditions dictate (i.e. in wet or slippery conditions, or off road), and can be selected with the vehicle on the move at up to 60 mph (and always with the wheels in the straight-ahead position). To engage the 4H mode from 2H (and to revert to 2H operation), the transfer box control lever is easily moved to the new position without pressing down on the lever.

By contrast '4L' (four wheel drive low ratio) is reserved for the most challenging conditions, including driving on soft muddy, sandy or rocky terrain, and (for example) when climbing steep slippery hills. This mode is engaged and disengaged with the vehicle at a standstill, and requires the transfer box control lever to be pressed down while moving the lever to the required position; easily accomplished.

The built-in 'hill holder' and 'hill descent control' functions help to inspire confidence and to aid safety in severe conditions.

'Air locking' front hubs are automatically activated/de-activated by engine vacuum when engaging/disengaging four wheel drive. In normal rear wheel drive (2H) mode, the hubs are free-running, but are locked when driving in 4H or 4L modes.

While I did not subject the latest 1.5 litre test car to severe off-roading use, in October 2017 I did sample a variety of four wheel drive Suzukis, including the 1.3 litre Jimny current at that time, on a very demanding and exceedingly rough route in south west Wales, and was hugely impressed by its capabilities. If you are interested in reading my report of that time, please go to:

<https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/suzuki-allgrip-models-getting-to-grips-with-them-during-road-and-off-road-tests/>



In fact I was first introduced to the capabilities of compact all wheel drive Suzukis back in the early 1980s, when carrying out comparative road test reviews of four wheel drive models of that era. Then, as now, the Suzukis acquitted themselves very well; the impressive heritage continues!

I should mention that wheel/axle 'articulation' is important in off-road driving over rough terrain, and while I did not take to slippery mud etc. in the latest car, I did drive it slowly over some grassy banks with deep gulleys between them, on private land. At all times all four wheels stayed on the ground and drive/progress was maintained. The rigid axle set-up helps; when one wheel on the axle is pushed up by ground conditions, the other wheel on the axle is pushed down, to maintain ground contact and traction.

Suzuki's on-board electronics, in the form of 'Brake LSD Traction Control' help today's four wheel drive system, so that if a wheel should start to slip, the brakes on this wheel are applied and the drive is redistributed to the other wheels that are still gripping.

INSIDE STORY

Wide-opening side doors allow easy entry to and exit from the front seats, which proved comfortable and supportive on long drives, and there's plenty of leg and head room for front seat occupants.

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Stowage spaces within the car include narrow, long bins in each of the side doors, plus a lidded glovebox on the passenger side of the vehicle, a small compartment plus twin cup holders at the rear of the central console, and an additional cubby hole ahead of the gear lever..

The glovebox is home to the very comprehensive owner's manual, well worth studying to get the best out of the vehicle. This useful volume also (and unusually these days) incorporates handy information relating to inspection and maintenance of the vehicle - well done Suzuki.



A separate, detailed manual covers the infotainment system – again worth reading for new owners to become familiar with the set-up.

For rear seat passengers, there's a bit of a climb and a clamber involved in order to reach the two rear seats, which will accommodate two adults but rear seat occupants during my time with the car reported that the seats felt a bit 'basic'. In addition, while head room in the rear was good, rear seat leg room was rather limited. The rear seat backrest angles are multi-adjustable (individually for each seat).

The car features grab handles in profusion within the cabin – useful for passengers to grasp during off-road work, also to help rear seat occupants to climb into and out of the vehicle.

The tailgate carries the spare wheel and is side-hinged to provide full-width easy access to the 'boot' area.

With four people aboard, the available luggage compartment is tiny, with just a small space behind the rear seat backs, although there is an additional shallow full-width storage compartment beneath the boot floor.

However, with two people in the car, and the rear seat backrests folded forward (they fold almost completely horizontal onto the seat bases), there's a usefully large, flat platform on which to place baggage. The rear seats are divided 50/50 too, so you could still carry three adults in the car plus a reasonable amount of luggage, if required.

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It's worth noting that there is no load cover so whatever you carry in the vehicle is somewhat on show unless you cover it with, say, a blanket (although the SZ5 features rear 'privacy' glass).

Having said all that the interior is pleasant enough and the dash plus its controls are straightforward to assimilate. The on-board computer has a scroll-through function to arrive



at the information required, including instantaneous and average fuel consumption readouts, for example.

Importantly too, the instruments are clear and easy to read (with excellent illumination at night), as is the central display for sat nav, radio, telephone operation etc.

While the test car did not have a CD player, it was equipped with a USB socket and other audio connection systems, enabling recorded music of choice to be played.

I liked the quickly-removable 'easy clean' rubber floor mats, which sit on top of the carpets and can be taken out of the car for rapid brushing or hosing down, when required.

DRIVING



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The 1.5 litre engine is a willing unit, providing greater power and performance than its 1.3 litre predecessor and running quietly at speeds up to about 60 to 65 mph. At higher speeds the engine is spinning comparatively fast, and inevitably working hard to propel the bluff-fronted bodywork.

Low overall gearing no doubt aids off-road use, but at 70 mph in top (fifth) gear, the engine is running at approximately 3,500 rpm. It is not unpleasantly noisy nor harsh at this speed, and there's still power in reserve, but to me it feels happier at (say) 60 to 65 mph.

Since this is intended to be a 'fun' car rather than a vehicle intended to be used frequently for long distance travelling, for most buyers this wouldn't be an issue, and in any case the car is quite capable of covering high daily mileages if required.



I should add that although maximum torque output arrives at 4,000 rpm, the engine pulls strongly from engine speeds below 2,000 rpm, and the vehicle is docile and enjoyable to conduct in town use and in hilly districts.

I found the Jimny easy to drive, and I liked the test car's slick-changing five speed manual gearbox (there's also a dash indicator light to advise optimum points when gearchanges might be made), also its power steering that I thought was perfectly-weighted for both high and low speed work.

The car is easy to park too, and due to its short overall length can be slotted into parking spaces where others might fear to venture...

All-round visibility for the driver is excellent, with the high seating position (and the driver's seat is height-adjustable), larger than usual door mirrors and a good view to the rear, all helping.

The large wheels and tyres plus the relatively stiff suspension provide a firm-ish ride and you can certainly feel the suspension working over rough sections, but I didn't find it uncomfortable. It was smoother too when fully loaded.

The Jimny also coped very well with deep ruts and potholes, and on gravel tracks traversed during my photo sessions, it felt stable and inspired confidence.

The bodywork is quite tall and I was expecting some body roll during cornering. To an extent I wasn't disappointed but I found that the Jimny stuck to its chosen route without drama, and was easily controlled. The brakes too felt positive at all speeds, without being over-sensitive.

Due to the height of the vehicle and its deliberately slab-sided styling, it is affected by side winds, especially at higher speeds and on motorways. During my time with the car I undertook one 200 mile round trip during a stormy interlude, and I could certainly feel the wind tugging at the bodywork. Having said that, maintaining steering control was not



difficult.

Night driving was enjoyable, with effective headlamps (which, incidentally, are provided with a washer system) and easy to rear instrumentation, as already mentioned.

At road speeds of up to around 60 mph, fuel consumption is very impressive, and we were seeing figures in the mid-50s per gallon when cruising under light throttle conditions. By contrast, driving at speeds approaching 70 mph sees the mpg figures worsening to around 40 mpg. Even so, our overall figure of 41.6 mpg over 378 miles in mixed real-life motoring seemed very good.





VERDICT

Terrific fun – but oh-so-capable too!

Yes there are a few limitations as covered in my text, but this vehicle is perfect for the market at which it is aimed and no wonder there are queues of potential buyers lining up for the latest Jimny.

Since recent (WLTP) changes to the CO2 emissions ratings have *just* pushed the Jimny into a higher rated band, the UK's nonsensical road tax system unfairly penalises this vehicle by landing owners with a huge and ludicrous VED bill of £855 for the first year (but £145 thereafter). (Note: For vehicles in the VED Band below, i.e. under 170 g/km, the figure is £515 – still high but £340 lower than it now costs for the first year for the diminutive Jimny). So if you are considering buying a Jimny, this high initial tax bill for the first year needs to be considered, in addition to the vehicle's purchase price. In other respects, including reasonable fuel consumption figures, the car should not be expensive to operate, especially from the second year onwards.



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WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC IN BRIEF:

Suzuki Jimny 1.5 SZ5 Allgrip (2019 'Dual Tone' model).

Engine: Four cylinder, 1.5 litre (1462cc), direct fuel injection petrol.

Transmission: Five speed manual gearbox; selectable four wheel drive with high and low ratio transfer box; descent control standard.

Power: 101 PS @ 6,000 rpm.

Torque: 130 Nm (95 lb.ft) @ 4,000 rpm.



Performance:

0-62 mph: (Estimated) 13 seconds.

Top speed: 90 mph.

Fuel consumption ('Official' figures):

New WLTP figure: Combined, 35.8 mpg.

On test, over 378 miles, average 41.6 mpg.

Fuel tank capacity: 40 litres (8.80 Imperial gallons).

Approximate range on full tank at our actual achieved mpg: 365+ miles.

CO2 Emissions: 178 g/km (new WLTP figure).

Taxation: VED: First year, £855; After first year, £145. BiK company car tax 37%.

Insurance Group: TBA.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions: Length 3,480 mm (11.42 ft) to rear bumper; 3,645 mm (11.96 ft) to spare wheel, Width 1645 mm (5.40 ft), Height 1,725 mm (5.66 ft), Wheelbase 2,250 mm (7.38 ft), Kerb weight 1,135 kg (2,502 lb), Luggage capacity 80 to 830 litres (2.82 to 29.31 cu.ft).

Price ('On the Road'): £17,999 (plus Dual Tone paintwork on test car, £650, making £18,649 in total).



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