



Suzuki 4WD range First impressions

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Suzuki's Four Wheel Drive range, summarised by Tom Scanlan...

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Not a lot of people, it seems, know that Suzuki makes cars and not just bikes.

They may have only 1.5% of the UK car market but buyers who move into a Suzuki for the first time tend to stay with it. No wonder, really, considering the value for money the cars offer: they seem well-made, with good quality materials and with generous equipment levels. And 143 UK dealers is a good number for a relatively small market share.

Included in the current Suzuki range are five cars offering 4WD. Two of these will very soon be sold out - the Grand Vitara Tara first, around about now and The Splash by the end of the year. Two new models will enter the scene, the Celerio (already huge in India!) and the IV-4 (so-named for the moment).

The three that will remain available are the Swift, the Jimny, and the SX4 S-cross. In motor industry terminology, the little Jimny is a sports utility vehicle (SUV) and the S-Cross is a Crossover car.

I tried the Jimny over a very testing off-road course that had been deeply rutted by Land Rovers. It was on special knobbly tyres (Malatesta all-terrain) and, although with a narrow track and a mere 1.3 litre petrol engine, it coped extraordinarily well. Its light weight was a contributing factor. The low ratio gears are selected simply by pressing a button; and, while Land Rovers and others have hill descent control, the Jimny went down scarily steep inclines



without the slightest problem – you just keep your feet off any pedals.

The Swift 4×4, on ordinary road tyres, was tested over dry farmland tracks that proved to be no challenge. This 4×4 has been bought by 800 customers since its launch last year which has delighted Suzuki and probably the cars' owners. The cheapest Swift 4×4 costs £11,799. It's also scored the full five-star Euro NCAP rating.

The bigger SX4 S-Cross proved equally adept, of course, but Suzuki gave journalists the chance to drive over for a variety of roads in North Yorkshire.

The car, whether with 120PS 1.6 petrol or 120PS 1.6 diesel engine, and in Allgrip specification was pleasant and easy to drive. The steering, feeling just a touch dead, was nevertheless precise and the handling was well tested on fast roads with sweeping bends and climbs and descents, all handled with aplomb; the suspension also gave a comfortable ride through the top-of-the-range leather seats.

The petrol engine car, with its sporty exhaust note, returned an indicated 41.4 mpg (official combined figure 49.5 mpg) and the diesel gave an indicated 54 mpg (official combined figure 64.2 mpg). Exhaust emissions for the manual gearbox cars were 135g/Km (£115 road tax) for the petrol and 114g/Km (£30 road tax) for the diesel. Unless your annual mileage is in the high thousands, the £2000 premium on diesel car costing £23,549 should send buyers towards the petrol version.

Amongst the equipment on these cars is a world-first double-sliding panoramic glass sunroof. The 4WD system has sport, snow and lock modes, all instantly deployable via a control on the central console. Both the S-Cross and Swift are very capable family cars that are easy to drive and, with 4WD, offer just that useful little bit extra.

There's something for all types of driver in this range and for a vastly less money than the best-known big 4X4s.