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Suzuki New Swift First Impressions (and hot off the press Suzuki news)

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Kirsty test drives Suzuki's latest and most advanced car, a Suzuki Swift, on a variety of roads in and around the French Riviera.

(All words and photographs by Kim).



To say that Suzuki has been going from strength to strength in recent years is a major understatement. In fact the firm is now the ninth largest car manufacturer in the world, and in sales terms is ahead of (for example) Mercedes-Benz and Peugeot...

The company has been introducing new models in profusion and the desirability of these cars in the eyes of the buying public has been proved by excellent - and ever-improving - sales figures.

Illustrating this, in Europe in 2015, 206,702 Suzukis were sold, with sales increasing to an estimated 232,000 in 2016 (therefore up by more than 12 per cent), and the plan for 2017 is 267,000 - translating to an increase of a further 15 per cent over the 2016 figures.

At a press conference held by Suzuki in Monaco this week (in conjunction with the launch of the new Swift supermini), motoring writers were advised of the company's overall progress in the marketplace, in historical and current context, and the importance of the new Swift within their model line-up. With 'small' cars making up more than 30 per cent of the total market for new vehicles (and therefore representing the biggest sector for sales), its value to Suzuki is clear.



[A flock of Swifts? Seen resting near Nice...](#)

In fact the firm is heading towards completing its first one hundred years of operations (this will be achieved in 2020) and is already looking at the 'Next 100'! To this end the modernisation of its model range continues, and customer 'conquest sales' from other manufacturers have helped to swell the sales numbers. In 2016 the company sold 2.8 million cars around the world, and the planned worldwide sales figures for 2019 amount to some 3.4 million cars...

In the UK, a total of 38,167 Suzukis were sold in 2016, representing the best year ever in Britain for the firm. However in 2017 it is estimated/expected that sales will amount to



41,000, meaning growth of around eight per cent. The company will also be working to sell more cars within the corporate market, as well as in the 'private buyer' sector, where it has always done well. From 5,225 corporate sales in 2016, they are looking at 10,000 sales per annum, just three years from now...

Of the 38,167 or so cars sold in 2016, 8,420 were Celerios, 11,115 were Swifts and 11,570 were Vitaras.

The very recently introduced Baleno, S-Cross and Ignis models were also selling strongly, and (for example) it is estimated that during 2017 around 10,000 buyers will choose an Ignis. Some 3,000 examples - 50 per cent more than the company's plan - were sold within three months of this new model going on sale; two-thirds of these were bought by buyers new to Suzuki, helped by a 'Free insurance' offer - especially attractive to younger buyers.

So with Suzuki now the fastest-growing manufacturer of cars sold in the UK, the company is doing very well here, as it is around the globe.

The New Swift

The first Suzuki bearing the Swift model name broke cover in 1983, and in 2004 the radical and first 'global strategy' version of the Swift was introduced, with the second generation - based on this car - arriving in 2010.

The Swift is the most popular and important Suzuki model, and is sold in 167 countries worldwide. To date some 5.4 million examples have been sold since 2005, with one million of these finding buyers in Europe, where the current model rates as the sixth best-selling car, just behind the Renault Clio. Some 127,000 of these have found buyers in the UK.

At this week's press conference in Monaco, many of the Suzuki personnel responsible for making the latest Swift a reality were on hand to talk to motoring writers about how the model has been designed and developed, and expressed their aims and hopes for their new car. Notably, they have endeavoured to make this new car 'Fun and sporty'...



Maseo Kobori, Chief Engineer for the new Swift, explained that the new Swift, manufactured for Europe at Suzuki's Sagara factory in Japan, was very much designed with European buyers in mind, as well as those in Japan and other markets. Indeed the European Swift has been made wider (by 40mm or 1.6in) and has wider track dimensions than the model as sold in its home market (in itself presenting a number of engineering challenges), and differs from it in a number of other ways too.

He told motoring journalists that to ensure that the newcomer specifically suits the roads and driving styles found in Europe, chassis testing was carried out in the UK and Germany, with other aspects of the car's design being comprehensively evaluated throughout Europe too.



He continued, saying that the resulting new Swift (while still recognisably and unmistakably a Swift through styling connections with its predecessor) is lower, wider and with a longer wheelbase, but, remarkably, it is shorter overall (by 10 mm or just under half an inch), and significantly lighter – by 120 kg or approximately 265 lb – than the previous model. (As an example, the entry-level SZ3 weighs just 890 kg or 1,962 lb).

Further new features of the latest Swift, highlighted by Maseo, include a built-in smartphone link, a flat-bottomed, 'D' shaped steering wheel (aiding entry and exit for the driver), interior pockets redesigned for easier use, and – importantly – a luggage compartment that has been increased in volume by 55 litres or 1.94 cu.ft (compared with the outgoing Swift), to a total of 265 litres or 9.36 cu.ft, representing a welcome increase in capacity of approximately 25 per cent. This is welcome as one of the recognised limitations of the previous model was its relatively small boot.

There is also a newly-developed four layer paint application process, resulting in an extraordinarily lustrous finish (and I personally noticed the smoothness and depth of shine on all the examples I studied at the launch).

Lighter, more lively, lower emissions...

The newcomer HAS to be good to succeed in a highly competitive supermini market sector that includes the likes of the SEAT Ibiza, Skoda Fabia, Hyundai i20, Kia Rio and Mazda2, but Suzuki is aiming high with the Swift, and expects to sell more than 12,500 examples in the first full year (70,000 in Europe).

The significant reduction in body weight, compared with the outgoing model, plus other engineering changes, translate into a power to weight ratio that has improved by 35 per cent, with power gains of up to 19 per cent, fuel consumption better by up to eight per cent and emissions lower by up to 10 per cent.

Following the recently-introduced Baleno and Ignis models, the latest Swift is built upon a new generation 'HEARTECT' platform ('underbody assembly'), deliberately lightweight and



rigid in nature, to deliver improved performance, economy and emissions.

The 'chassis' approach has been to overhaul the platform and redesign it, plus the components attached to it, as a 'unified' assembly which is 30 kg (66 lb) lighter compared with the previous Swift, contributing to the overall reduction in vehicle weight, already mentioned, plus benefits in terms of improved Noise, Vibration and Harshness (NVH) characteristics.

The body shell incorporates Ultra High tension steel (across 17 per cent of its structure) plus High tension steel (four per cent).

The overall result is a highly rigid structure that is said to improve collision safety and has a continuous, smooth, curving form that is better at dispersing energy. Running, turning and braking aspects have also all been improved by the new design.

For practicality (and by contrast with its predecessor) the new car is only available in five door (hatchback) form, but by cleverly concealing the rear door handles (just behind the door windows), a sporty 'three door appearance' is maintained.



Further distinctive features of the latest body styling include a redesigned grille, 'sculptured' doors and a roof that appears to be 'floating', to give the car a lower look. In reality the new car is, in any case, lower than its predecessor by 15 mm (just over half an inch) and wider by 40 mm (approximately an inch and a half).

Inside story

Although the new Swift is a little shorter than the outgoing model, the wheelbase has been increased by 20 mm (almost an inch), enabling more space to be created within the vehicle, as well as a larger luggage compartment than hitherto.



Lowering the seats within the bodywork has helped to maintain good head room (the same as the previous model, for front seat occupants), and has improved vertical and lateral space by 23 mm (almost one inch) in each case, for rear seat passengers. Each (redesigned) front seat has also been moved outwards by 10 mm (nearly half an inch).

Notable features of the dashboard include an LCD display (colour or monochrome, depending on version), in the centre, with coolant and engine temperature gauges built into the two main (and crystal-clear) instrument assemblies. The centre console is angled towards the driver, by five degrees.



Running Gear

The suspension – developed for European driving conditions – includes MacPherson struts at the front and air-ride at the rear. Modifications, compared with the previous Swifts, include the adoption of a shorter and now hollow front stabiliser bar, and a lighter front sub-frame assembly. The rear cross-member has been re-shaped and the trailing arms amended to improve ride quality.

Steering upgrades have included the installation of a hollow steering rack (to reduce weight) and the engineering of a wider steering angle, to provide a tighter turning circle (0.45 metres or about 1.5 feet) than with the outgoing Swift.



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A variable ratio steering rack is used, to enable the angle of the wheels to vary according to steering input. This increases steering response when the driver starts to turn the wheel, to provide a more positive driving experience and sharper handling.



High Tech, High Spec...

Trim levels retain the designations previously used in the Swift, with SZ3 denoting the 'entry level' version, powered exclusively by Suzuki's proven 1.2 litre K12C four cylinder 'Dualjet' engine, which made its debut in 2014 in the Swift, and is also used in the Baleno. This drives the front wheels via a five speed manual gearbox.

Twin fuel injectors, positioned very close to the inlet valves, are employed, creating finer fuel atomisation for more effective transfer to the engine, also a freshly designed inlet port and combustion chamber set-up. The pistons have a shallow bowl shape and also incorporate cooling oil jets to reduce internal temperatures. Further mechanical component



modifications have reduced frictional losses and aided smooth running.

An Exhaust Gas Recirculation system is used too, helping to prevent 'knocking'.

Improved performance, fuel consumption and emissions have resulted from all these measures.

The power output is a healthy 90 PS at 6,000 rpm, and its maximum torque of 120 Nm (88 lb.ft) is delivered at 4,400 rpm. Acceleration to 62 mph from rest takes 11.9 seconds, and the top speed is 111 mph. The official 'Combined' fuel consumption is an impressive 65.7 mpg, although slightly less frugal figures would be expected in in typical real life motoring. CO2 emissions are rated at 98 g/km.

For 'entry level', don't read 'basic', for the SZ3 comes as standard with six airbags, an 'Electronic Stability Programme' ('ESP') and a wealth of other safety-related and security systems, air conditioning, DAB radio with Bluetooth and four speakers, daytime running lamps and privacy glass, a leather-trimmed steering wheel, electrically-operated front windows and a long list of other useful features.

Next rung up the specifications ladder brings you to the SZ-T, powered by Suzuki's innovative 1.0 litre three cylinder 'Boosterjet' engine. This unit is also used in the Baleno and latest S-Cross, both of which arrived in 2016.

Said to provide the same levels of power and torque as a normal-aspirated engine of a much larger capacity (typically 1.7 to 1.8 litres), this diminutive but big-hearted unit incorporates Direct Injection and TurboCharging (DITC), to produce an output of 111 PS at 5,500 rpm, and, with the five speed manual gearbox used in the SZ-T, gives a maximum torque figure of 170 Nm (125 lb.ft) all the way from 2,000 to 3,500 rpm. However, in fact the turbocharger (a very compact unit, made by IHI), starts delivering from 1,500 rpm or so... in other words, a much lower engine speed than is typically the case, and thus enhancing driving flexibility.

The turbocharger, which operates with a boost pressure of 1.0 Bar, is bolted directly to the



cylinder head, and the exhaust manifold is built into the cylinder head casting. The combined effects of these design features help to ensure maximum gas flow with minimal heat loss, through to the turbocharger.

The Boosterjet system controls the turbo's wastegate valve, which is closed during heavy load operation to create higher boost pressure, but which remains open during normal driving. Pumping losses are reduced by the system, thus improving power output and fuel consumption.

To prevent 'turbo stall' in situations where the throttle is closed and then rapidly re-opened, an air by-pass valve is built into the system.

The fuel injectors each incorporate six apertures and high tumble port technology is also used, for optimum combustion, power, emissions and fuel consumption performance.

The fuel is introduced to the combustion under a pressure of 35 Bar, forming a fuel-rich mixture around the spark plug, with a leaner mixture around the outer edge of the piston. A straight inlet port and complex profile piston crown aid the tumble flow of the fuel. Further aiding combustion to suit different driving conditions, a variable pressure control system is also used.

Performance figures show a zero to 62 mph acceleration time of 10.6 seconds with the five speed manual gearbox found in the SZ-T, and a top speed of 121 mph. The official 'Combined' fuel consumption figure is 61.4 mpg.

Compared with the SZ3, additional items of standard equipment found on the SZ-T include Smartphone Linkage Display Audio (SLDA), front fog lamps, a rear view camera and 16 inch aluminium alloy road wheels. The SLDA system features a seven inch touch panel display, allowing the use of some smartphone applications with MirrorLink, Android Auto and Apple CarPlay connection.

Next up in terms of equipment is the range-topping SZ5, offered in three versions: 1.0



Boosterjet engine with 'Smart Hybrid Vehicle by Suzuki' ('SHVS') technology – more of which anon – and a five speed manual gearbox, 1.0 Boosterjet with six speed automatic transmission, and 1.2 Dualjet power with SHVS and ALLGRIP four wheel drive system, in conjunction with the six speed auto gearbox.

The SHVS technology provides a 'mild hybrid' system for saving power (and enhancing fuel consumption). It incorporates a belt-driven 'Integrated Starter Generator' ('ISG') which behaves like a starter motor AND a generator of electrical power. It assists the petrol engine during vehicle start-off and acceleration phases (thus saving fuel), also generating electricity by means of regenerative braking. Its application in the Swift represents the first use of this technology in conjunction with the Boosterjet engine, and helps bring CO2 emissions down to as low as 97 g/km.

An integral part of the ISG system is a compact, high performance 12 volt lithium-ion battery, located beneath the front passenger seat. This battery stores energy and incorporates an 'idle stop' function, activated by the ISG. In addition it provides power for the engine's electrical components, the instrumentation and the audio system. Clever stuff indeed!

The SHVS system uses the ISG to start the engine in all situations except when the petrol motor is first started from cold. This means smooth, quiet engine re-starts.

The total additional weight of the SHVS system is just 6.2 kg (13.7 lb), and for the record, the ISG unit provides a power output of 2.3 kW (3.1 PS) and a torque output of 50 Nm (36.9 lb.ft).

Additional items installed in the SZ5 models, above the specification of the SZ-T, include (among other useful features) automatic air conditioning, satellite navigation, keyless entry and start, rear electric windows, LED lamps front and rear, polished 16 inch sports wheels and a six speaker audio system.



It also features an 'Advanced Forward Detection' system, which uses a camera and a laser sensor to detect and warn the driver about the close proximity of a vehicle or pedestrian (etc.) ahead, also providing autonomous emergency braking when required, lane departure warning and 'High Beam Assist'. In addition it employs millimetre-wave radar to operate adaptive cruise control.

SZ5 buyers can optionally specify Suzuki's four wheel drive ALLGRIP system (available in conjunction with the 1.2 litre Dualjet engine and SHVS), which provides fully automatic, permanent all wheel drive. When required, this system transfers extra torque to the rear wheels, via a viscous coupling. This acts as a centre differential, and incorporates two sets of annular (circular) metal plates that rotate within a casing containing a silicon type of



fluid. When wheel slippage occurs, the fluid becomes hotter due to increased friction/shear caused by differences in the movement of the two sets of plates. This makes the fluid more viscous, in turn locking the coupling and feeding more torque to the rear wheels.

It is anticipated that this ALLGRIP version will account for around 10 per cent of sales of the new Swift.

Behind the wheel



At the launch of the new Swift, earlier this week, I was able to test-drive a 1.0 litre Boosterjet-powered three cylinder version, on a variety of roads between, and inland of,



Nice and Monaco. The test route included autoroutes, main roads and in-town driving, and also twisting hilly sections of road through mountainous areas.

I should explain that at the launch the only version available for journalists to drive was the 1.0 litre three cylinder Boosterjet model, with five speed manual transmission and in left-hand drive form, as right-hand drive cars are not yet available (hence my photographs show the left-hand drive car that I sampled). In addition, I should mention that the equipment levels of the left-hand drive European models differ very slightly from the UK specification cars (the main difference being that heated front seats are not available on UK versions). Having said that, in most respects the high specification version that I drove was almost identical in equipment levels to the UK-spec. SZ5.

My first impressions were very favourable in terms of the styling, paintwork quality, practicality and interior ambience. To me the car felt more spacious than its predecessor, and the rear seats provided excellent head room, although leg room was not over-generous.



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luggage compartment, while not enormous, is far better than that found in the previous generation Swift models, and easily accommodated a number of bags, coats, etc.



I liked the new facia set-up, incorporating oh-so-clear instruments and, as with the rest of the interior, it looked and felt well put-together. I also liked the redesigned storage compartments and door pockets – easier to use than in the earlier cars.

The front seats proved to be comfortable during an extended test drive, with plenty of side support. There was a good view of the road ahead, and I found reversing easier than imagined, although the rear quarters of the car are quite high, with thick corner pillars.



Although I didn't travel in the back of the car, I did sit in it, and found there was excellent head room and reasonable leg room available.

Strong performance

The three cylinder 1.0 litre Boosterjet engine proved to be a delight, pulling strongly throughout the rev range, and providing impressive acceleration from around 1,500 rpm upwards (and especially with engine speeds above 2,000 rpm). The unit was happy to rev freely when required, yet equally was docile and provided excellent torque (pulling power) from low rpm.

Several sections of the test route incorporated steep gradients and sharp bends - especially on the zig-zag roads in the mountains inland from the Mediterranean coast. At all times the steering felt precise, the brakes were responsive without being over-sharp, and the car could be cornered with ease; it felt composed and with little body roll being evident.

I liked the way that the Swift gained speed rapidly when required, even when climbing 'challenging' slopes. The turbocharger set-up does what it says on the tin, with no 'lag' being detected by this writer, at any time.

The car also felt smooth and refined, and was quiet when cruising at high speeds on the autoroutes, and even when working hard the engine was not noisy. At low engine speeds it was near-silent.

The transmission also proved to be enjoyable to use, with well-chosen ratios, smooth, slick gearchanges and a positive clutch action.

Rough road surfaces were encountered in many areas along the route, but the Suzuki took them all in its stride, and was not unsettled by deep ruts and potholes.

It was telling that after a day's driving over a picturesque but challenging route, taking in a wide variety of road situations, my co-driver and I had both formed a very high opinion of



the car. In fact we found nothing of significance to criticise, although a little more rear seat leg room would be welcome for long-legged passengers.

VERDICT

'Fun and sporty'...? Oh yes. The new Swift certainly lives up to those aims, expressed by Suzuki. Add to that comfortable, practical, great to drive and economical. Talking of which, the official 'Combined' consumption figure for the 1.0 Boosterjet SZ5 is 65.7 mpg. Of course I was driving a European version, with the on-board computer reading in metric units. This showed an average consumption during our drive of 4.9 litres per 100 kilometres, which translates to 57.6 mpg. This was over a demanding route, including some queues and town driving, and I reckon this example came commendably close to the official figure (as I have consistently found with other Suzuki models).

Well done Suzuki. I am sure that the new Swift will – deservedly – be another success story for the company.

Having said that, how much will the new Swift cost? Well, that's the 64,000 Dollar question (but hopefully not that much...), and Suzuki hasn't yet revealed pricing for the new cars, but has confirmed that it will be 'competitive'. It has been suggested/expected that the prices will sit approximately midway between those of the new Ignis (starting figure, £9,999) and the Baleno (from £12,749). According to my reckoning, the midway point between these figures is £11,374. That could be somewhere near, as the current Swift line-up starts at £11,649... Anyway, this is all conjecture, and we shall find out very soon, as I am told that the UK pricing will be confirmed at the end of April.

(Another question... Will there be another, more sporting Swift Sport or similar model? Watch this space...).

The new Swift will be in Suzuki showrooms from mid-May, and the cars go on sale in the UK on 1st June. Please form an orderly queue...



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Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Suzuki Swift 1.0 Boosterjet SZ5 manual

Price: To be confirmed.

Engine: 998 cc 12 valve three cylinder Boosterjet petrol, 111 PS @ 5,500 rpm; 170 Nm (125 lb.ft) torque @ 2,000 to 3,500 rpm.

Transmission: Five speed manual gearbox; front wheel drive.



Performance:

0-62 mph: 10.6 seconds.

Top speed: 121 mph.

Emissions: Euro 6 compliant. CO2 104 g/km.

Fuel consumption: (Official 'Combined'): 65.7 mpg. On test: 57.6 mpg.

Dimensions:

Length: 3,840 mm (12.60 ft).

Width (overall): 1,735 mm (5.69 ft).

Height (overall): 1,495 mm (4.90 ft).

Luggage capacity (rear seats occupied): 265 litres (9.36 cu.ft).

Luggage capacity (rear seats folded): 579 litres (20.45 cu.ft).

Kerb weight (including full options): 915 kg (2,017 lb).

If you are interested in reading Dave Randle's report on the new Swift, written in his own inimitable way and applying his scientific thoughts, please click [HERE](#).