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Suzuki S-Cross 1.6 Diesel Twin-clutch Automatic Road Test

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Suzuki S-Cross 1.6 Diesel Twin-clutch Auto.

Assessed by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).



My headline uses a short version of what this new model is called in full – the Suzuki S-Cross 1.6 DDiS ALLGRIP SZ5 TCSS. Bear with me whilst I explain. DDiS refers to the 1.6-litre 120 hp direct injection turbodiesel engine, ALLGRIP refers to its variable modes 4WD system, SZ5 is its one and only high spec level and TCSS means Twin Clutch System by Suzuki.

The S-Cross is a five door, five seater, mid-sized Crossover with petrol and diesel engine options and two or four wheel drive models. There are SZ3, SZ-T and SZ5 spec levels and prices start from just £13,999. But these rise to a hefty £25,149 for the new diesel twin-clutch auto version I am testing here. Suzuki always has finance offers for customers on their new models and currently the owner buying a new S-Cross will receive £2,000 deposit allowance using their four years, 2.9% Personal Contract Purchase finance option. The current PCP prices range from £149 to £269 per month.

The S-Cross was first introduced to the UK in October 2013 and proved popular with Suzuki's traditional loyal retail customers. It also pulled in company car drivers attracted by the now popular SUV/Crossover styling and lower Benefit-in-Kind tax gathering emissions.

Downsizing from a larger company car to a trendy Crossover doesn't appear to harm one's car owning status.

The S-Cross achieves around 6,000 UK sales annually but it has become overshadowed by the newer Suzuki Vitara five door SUV range launched last year. This range offers 1.4 and 1.6 petrol and 1.6 turbodiesel engines with 2WD and ALLGRIP 4WD models. High demand is such that around 10,000 units should be sold in the UK this year at prices starting from £13,999 and rising to £22,249.

Having a mid-sized Crossover range and a mid-sized SUV range with similar prices might seem a product planning and marketing nightmare for Suzuki, they are in effect their own competitor. But with the huge growth in sales of such vehicles, both in Europe where they are the largest selling sector and in the UK where Crossover/SUV sales rose 21% last year, Suzuki says it is well placed to take advantage of this record demand.



So what is the difference in styling between the two ranges? The Vitara in terms of appearance is a five door chunky SUV; the S-Cross as its name suggests is classed as a Crossover which is part elevated five door hatchback/estate and part SUV. In terms of length the S-Cross is actually longer at 4,300 mm (14.1 ft) compared to the Vitara at 4,175 mm (13.7 ft). In terms of boot and load space the S-Cross offers more with 430 litres (15.2 cu.ft) with the rear seats in place and 875 litres (30.9 cu.ft) with them folded. By comparison, equivalent figures for the Vitara are 375 litres (13.2 cu.ft) and 710 litres (25.1 cu.ft).



Suzuki's logic for introducing the S-Cross diesel with a new technology twin-clutch auto gearbox is that in the UK one in six diesel Crossovers are now ordered with an automatic transmission. As yet the Vitara SUV diesel does not have this option but petrol engine



models do. S-Cross petrol powered models use a CVT type auto gearbox.

For the S-Cross range the downside is that the new auto transmission is only available with the 1.6 litre diesel engine coupled with ALLGRIP 4WD system and with the top level SZ5 spec. The auto transmission costs an extra £1,350 over the six speed manual gearbox so that makes the whole vehicle £25,149 which is far away from the headline starting price for the range of £13,999. If an S-Cross with a 1.6 petrol engine is your choice coupled with an auto gearbox and ALLGRIP 4WD, then it's the older and noisier CVT transmission type and that as well only comes with the high level SZ5 spec level and costs £23,199. There is also a 1.6 petrol CVT model with 2WD and a lower SZ-T spec level priced at £19,849.

The new TCSS six speed automated manual transmission incorporates hydraulically controlled clutches. The system utilises one clutch for 1st, 3rd and 5th gears and the other for 2nd, 4th and 6th gears. Operating the transmission in this way is supposed to ensure that whether the driver is accelerating or decelerating the desired gear is instantly available.

In reality with the diesel model I tried the gearchanges were not quite as sharp or instantaneous as some other twin-clutch auto transmissions. I found that first thing in the morning when cold, it held onto gear ratios longer, especially changing from 2nd to 3rd gears. Even when selecting the Sport mode, the system seemed to hold onto gear ratios longer than ideal with a diesel engine, so not maximising the higher torque of the diesel unit due to the wide spread gear ratios. That didn't seem to harm the real-life fuel economy, as during my week long test, covering my usual motorway, country A/B roads and some in-town travel, the figure was 50.4 mpg. Good as it was that was it was still well short of the official Combined Cycle figure of 62.8 mpg. With CO2 emissions of 119 g/km the VED road tax cost is £0 for the First Year rate and then only £30 for subsequent years.

[Note from Kim: In response to David's feelings, above, about the transmission system holding on to the gears longer than expected when starting from cold, Suzuki advises, "The TCSS system is designed to operate in this way (holding on to 2nd and 3rd ratios longer when cold). The reasons are to warm the catalyser system at a faster rate with the subsequent



effect of lowering emissions and improving engine efficiency. Although TCSS is essentially a FIAT sourced Marelli unit, there are some programming differences linked with the ALLGRIP system.”].

As for performance, with the 1.6 turbodiesel engine and the TCSSS auto box, the top speed was a modest 108 mph, although it cruised happily at maximum legal motorway speeds; the zero to 62mph acceleration figure was again modest at 13.0 seconds.

In addition to the conventional auto gearchange lever the system has a manual mode which allows changes to be up or down the ratios using the steering column mounted shift paddles. The ALLGRIP 4WD system has four modes; Auto which uses 2WD as the default setting and 4WD automatically is engaged if wheel spin is detected. There is Sport mode for more enthusiastic driving, Snow mode for slippery on and off road driving in mud, snow or ice and then is Lock mode for operating in even more severe snow, mud or sand conditions.

The 1.6 litre turbodiesel engine is well known in the Suzuki range with its 120 hp and a healthy amount of torque of 320 Nm (236 lb.ft) from 1,750 rpm. It is not the smoothest or quietest modern EU 6 compliant turbodiesel engine on the market, but it is robust. With the wide spread gear ratios the engine does ‘growl’ under acceleration because the twin-clutch system hangs onto the lower ratios for too long before engaging a higher gear and then there is a certain amount of snatch as the system changes from one ratio to another. It works well enough but it is not as refined as it could be. That said this twin-clutch auto does make light work of driving and is far superior to continuously variable auto transmissions (CVTs).

The SZ5 high spec level provides lots of standard equipment plus the usual electric front/rear windows, air con and so on from lower spec versions. DAB radio is standard for the SZ5 as is the double sliding panoramic sunroof, cruise control, rear view camera, computer, push-button start, leather upholstery with heated front seats, auto lights and wipers, sat-nav, Bluetooth, 17 inch alloy wheels, wheelarch extensions and under body protection mouldings.



VERDICT

Overall the Suzuki S-Cross is a likeable and practical Crossover. It's striking and sporty to look at, and I found it more agile than the conventional Vitara SUV. It is roomier with more load space than the Vitara as well, although the latter models are marginally cheaper so that will be an attraction for some owners. The S-Cross produces less cornering body roll than the Vitara but the ride comfort and handling can be on the choppy side, depending on the road surfaces. There are some important plus points when choosing the new twin-clutch auto 1.6 diesel S-Cross over other versions but also a few minuses such as price and the limited choice of only one high level of specification.

For: Meets the growing demand for a modern technology twin-clutch auto gearbox with a diesel engine, good fuel economy, low tax costs, smart looks combined with practical



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passenger/load carrying combinations.

Against: The diesel engine and twin-clutch auto gearbox combination with ALLGRIP 4WD is only offered with one top of the range level of specification that makes it pricey, choppy ride at times, slow gearchanges.



MILESTONES AND WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF:



Suzuki SX4 S-Cross 1.6 DDiS, ALLGRIP, SZ5, TCSS, 5 door Crossover.

Engine: 1.6 litre, 4 cylinder turbodiesel.

Transmission: 6 speed TCSS twin clutch auto, ALLGRIP 4WD.

Power: 120 hp.

Torque: 320 Nm (236 lb.ft) from 1,750 rpm.

Performance:

0-62mph 13.0 seconds.

Top speed: 108 mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 62.8 mpg (50.4 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 119 g/km, VED road tax £0/£30. BIK company car tax 23% from April 2016.

Insurance Group: 18A.

Warranty: 3 years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: 5 doors/5 seats, L 4,300 mm (14.1 ft), W 1,765 mm (5.8 ft), H 1,575 mm (5.2 ft), boot/load space 430 to 875 litres (15.2 to 30.9 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,200 kg (2,645 lb).

Price: £25,149.



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