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Suzuki SX4 S-Cross 1.4 SZ5 ALLGRIP – Road Test

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David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) test drives the Suzuki SX4 S-Cross 1.4 SZ5 ALLGRIP 4WD automatic crossover...

2017 saw the SUV/Crossover/4WD market sector continue the trend set in 2016 for month-on-month record increases in sales, not just in the UK but Europe as well. In the UK one out of every five new cars sold was an SUV or Dual Purpose vehicle.

2018 has started in the same vein with even more new SUV/Crossover models joining the already oversubscribed array and sales for January show a 6.6% increase, the only segment to show growth. Just arriving is the Mitsubishi Eclipse Cross, the latest Kia Sorento seven seater large SUV and the updated Ford EcoSport. These closely follow the most recent



arrivals such as the VW Tiguan Allspace seven-seater SUV, the SEAT Arona, Skoda Karoq and DS7 Crossback. The new Mitsubishi Shogun Sport and Volvo XC40 will be arriving in UK showrooms soon and we will be getting behind the wheel of those as well.

Whilst more choice with more new models is great, the trouble is with all this 'new metal' arriving, thoroughly efficient well-priced existing SUVs/Crossover can get overlooked. A good example of existing models still being appealing is Suzuki where in the UK their SUV/Crossover models made a significant contribution to a record year for sales in 2017 with an increase of 6% to reach 40,343. The overall new car market was down by nearly 6% last year and by 6.3% in January this year.

One of Suzuki's SUV/Crossover model ranges is the Suzuki SX4 S-Cross. It's been around since 2013 but was heavily revised late in 2016 for the 2017 model year with improved styling and gaining an extra 15 mm (just over half an inch) ride height, it became better equipped with improved engines and it's still a relevant range in today's very competitive and over-subscribed market sector.



The Suzuki S-Cross SX4 range is now priced from £17,499 to £26,249 following a £500 price increase across the range from 1 January 2018. PCP prices over a 42 month period start from £199 a month. The S-Cross is in essence a family sized five door hatchback with an elevated ride-height giving it a Crossover layout. It's a little larger in dimensions with more boot space than their out-and-out rugged Vitara five door SUV priced from £15,999 and both ranges offer 2WD and 4WD versions.

The latest S-Cross range is available with 1.0 litre 111 hp and 1.4 litre 140 hp Boosterjet turbocharged petrol engines and there is the option of a 1.6 DDiS 120 hp turbodiesel unit as well. Both petrol units have the option of a six-speed automatic transmission instead of the manual gearboxes and Suzuki's 'smart' ALLGRIP 4WD facility is an option for the 1.0 petrol and 1.6 turbodiesel engines with manual gearboxes, and standard for the 1.4 petrol engine



with manual or auto gearboxes. Depending on the engine/transmission chosen there is the choice of three specification levels; SZ4, the SZ-T level (aimed at fleet and company car users) and a fully equipped top level SZ5.

During the Christmas and New Year holiday period, given our unpredictable weather and travel conditions, I find it prudent to have a 4WD test car which is reasonably roomy, fuel efficient and easy to drive on-hand to meet family travel requirements. So this time Suzuki UK kindly loaned me the S-Cross 1.4 Boosterjet SZ5 with ALLGRIP and its standard auto gearbox, now priced at £26,099.

Even after its latest styling updates the S-Cross isn't the prettiest vehicle in its class but it is very functional. The latest major facelift introduced a more distinctive and upright front end. Flanked by sleeker and more efficient headlights is an 'ugly duckling' grille with vertical slats and it's edged in chrome giving it's a glitzy lipstick surround. This is very Asian in style although the S-Cross is built at the Magyar Suzuki plant in Hungary which also produces the Swift and Vitara models that thankfully have more appealing 'faces'. Other than the grille the rest of the S-Cross is fairly conventional and well proportioned. Black protection skid plates and mouldings circle the lower sections of the body from front to rear giving it a practical rugged look. At the rear is a wide opening tailgate leading to a 430 litre (15.18 cu.ft) boot which expands to 875 litres (30.90 cu.ft) with the rear seats folded. The tailgate is flanked by new design LED combination lights. Inside there is now more soft-feel trim for the dashboard and a new centre located touchscreen with updated and faster acting functions. Whilst the leather upholstery and soft-feel plastics improve the overall ambience of the interior there are still areas of hard plastic trim which look more 'budget' than 'plush'. At over £25,500 this version of the S-Cross is not cheap although most of its price has gone into its excellent new engine, auto gearbox and ALLGRIP 4WD features.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

Standard specification includes seven airbags, electronic stability programme, Hill Hold Control, Bluetooth, DAB radio, air-con, daytime running lights, 16-inch aluminium alloy



wheels, central door locking, cruise control, electric windows, electrically operated and heated door mirrors and 60/40 split folding and reclining rear seats. The SZ-T level adds such items as projector LED headlights, LED daytime running lights, keyless entry and push button start, sat-nav, 17-inch alloy wheels, rear parking camera, front and rear parking sensors, auto lights and wipers, front fog lights and silver coloured roof rails. The SZ5 specification version I tried adds that all important Radar Brake Support function, leather upholstery, heated front seats and a double sliding panoramic glass sunroof.



It is in the areas of engine, transmission and ALLGRIP that the S-Cross really scores, plus being the right 'middle ground' size in a competitive market. The 1.4-litre, four-cylinder Boosterjet petrol engine uses direct injection coupled with a small capacity, high torque turbocharger with the Boosterjet function controlling the wastegate valve, reducing boost pressure losses and turbo-lag. The 140 hp output is impressive enough but the secret to this



engine's performance is the 220 Nm (162 lb.ft) of torque and that is available through a wide rev range from just 1,500 rpm up to 4,000 rpm. It delivers torque swiftly during acceleration, and that continues without running out of energy until well over the top legal speed limit. It also means that there is plenty of 'grunt' available for overtaking slower traffic at mid-range speeds. Another advantage of the wide torque band is that it allows use of widely-spaced gear ratios for either the six speed manual gearbox or the six speed auto transmission I tested, improving response at all speeds and potentially better fuel economy at high speeds using low rpm engine speed. Stop/start in-town driving using minimal revs, because of the high torque, was also impressive. Having the auto gearbox option was perfect and the icing on the Christmas cake for refined and easy driving.

It's not a slow combination either, 70 mph cruising was effortless, top speed is 124 mph and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is 10.2 seconds. Officially this model will return 49.5 mpg in the Combined Cycle and during my Christmas/New Year motoring, long and short runs over a variety of roads returned an average of 44.4 mpg. But at times, given the very cold weather, driving in snow, ice and floods, the overall figure dropped to 39.8 mpg but that wouldn't be the figure for most of the year. With CO2 emissions of 128 g/km, First Year VED road tax is £160 and then £140 annually after that. Insurance is Group 24D and the warranty period is three years/60,000 miles.

Given the hazardous weather this winter I was really happy that this 1.4-litre Boosterjet engine comes with ALLGRIP traction as standard. The system, with its four modes, operates most of the time in Auto mode, deciding on slippage of the tyres whether it needs front or all wheel drive. Auto mode prioritises fuel economy during typical driving conditions, Sport mode adds a little more zip and maximises the ALLGRIP system for added road adhesion, Snow mode is also used for mud and ice, selecting four wheel drive as the default setting. Finally Lock mode is used for snow, mud or sand conditions with the limited slip differential braking the slipping wheels and providing traction to the wheels with the most grip. All modes are selected by using a close to hand rotary control unit plus a Lock button alongside it.



Handling on the road was generally well balanced and surefooted; the ride comfort was good as well with only the impacts from the worst potholes unsettling the ride.

VERDICT

All in all the S-Cross, although not the newest range on sale in its sector, is a thoroughly capable mid-sized Crossover with this engine, auto gearbox and ALLGRIP control. I just wonder how many owners of smart new SUVs and Crossovers in the recent severe winter weather conditions now wish they had bought one with four wheel drive rather than opting for the cheaper front wheel drive versions.





For: Excellent high torque turbo petrol engine, slick auto gearbox ALLGRIP 4WD traction, high specification, comfortable and easy to drive.

Against: Ugly grille, some hard cheap feel interior plastic trim, not a generous warranty, recent price increase.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Suzuki SX4 S-Cross 1.4 Boosterjet SZ5 ALLGRIP, automatic.

Price: £26,099.



Engine/transmission: 1.4 litre, four cylinder, direct injection turbocharged petrol, 140 hp, 220 Nm (162 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm, six speed automatic with manual mode, ALLGRIP 4WD traction.

Performance: 124 mph, 0-62 mph 10.2 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 49.5 mpg (39.8 to 44.4 mpg on test depending on travel/weather conditions).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 128 g/km, VED road tax £160/£140, BiK company car tax 24%.

Insurance Group: 24D.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,300 mm (14.11 ft), W 1,785 mm (5.86 ft), H 1,585 mm (5.20 ft), boot/load space 430/875 litres (15.19/30.90 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,200 kg (2,646 lb), five doors/five seats.