



Suzuki Vitara SZ5 Self-Charging Full Hybrid – First Impressions

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Chris Adamson samples the latest hybrid Vitara from Suzuki...

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An association with Toyota means that two of the models in the current Suzuki showroom (Swace and Across) share platforms and technology with their Japanese partners – but one model that very much ploughs Suzuki’s own path is the latest self-charging full hybrid Vitara.



For starters it matches a small electric motor to a normally aspirated 1.5 litre petrol engine, while most others are tacking on turbochargers and, on top of this, the power is transmitted to all four wheels via a new automated manual transmission.

The 24 kW Motor Generator unit (which is located on the outside of the transmission so that



power is directly transmitted to the drive-shafts) consists of a 140 V lithium-ion battery and inverter which acts as both a generator and a starter motor, which initially assists the petrol engine when the vehicle is started and provides a smart take-off.



It then intermittently kicks-in (indicated by a light on the instrument panel) to fill the torque gap during shifting which aids smooth transmission changes and provides a very distinctive linear power progression.

At the same time as delivering short bursts of power, the hybrid system also collects kinetic energy during braking and generates electricity by stopping the engine and disengaging the



clutch during deceleration.

The hybrid set-up also includes a 12 V lithium-ion battery as well as a conventional 12 V lead-acid battery to power components such as lights, instruments and heating.

This additional power is added to the multipoint fuel injected four cylinder 16 valve 1462cc petrol unit that will develop a modest 115 bhp and probably needs the extra electric input.

Suzuki fits an EV only button which can be selected to reduce emissions and fuel consumption by suppressing the amount of accelerator application – but this won't last for long and it needs an extremely delicate foot on the accelerator to stop it bringing in the petrol engine.

I found it really only works if you can keep speeds below 30 mph which is fine in slow moving stop-start traffic, but more of a frustration in normal free-flowing urban environments.

Suzuki makes no claim for how far you can travel on EV only before the battery is exhausted but admits that a kilometre would be a fair estimate – so don't expect to save vast amounts of unleaded or travel long distances on silent running.

Selecting EV means that the power-sapping full air conditioning system is unavailable and it also locks the driver out from choosing anything other than the automatic driving mode (part of Suzuki's simple but well tried and tested ALLGRIP four-wheel drive system).

The optional Sport, Snow and differential Lock modes are unavailable in the EV setting, but then it is unlikely you would want these in low speed city situations anyway.

Back on the standard setting the Sport button adds a bit more aggression to what is a rather tame petrol unit in most circumstances.

Varying between the standard auto and sport settings on a mixed journey that included a



long stretch of motorway and then some urban driving with the electric motor working in isolation through towns and villages, I managed to see an average fuel consumption figure of 41.7 mpg which was well short of Suzuki's official Combined prediction.

Rather than install a conventional fully automatic CVT transmission on the Hybrid Vitara, Suzuki has opted to fit a six-speed automated manual. The primary reason is that this configuration is lighter (about 15 kg or 33 lb) and it is also fractionally cheaper to produce.

This is the first application of the system on a current Suzuki but will be added to the S-Cross line-up in the autumn

The unit will quite happily do its own thing to optimise performance and fuel economy without any interference from the driver but, as a tip, drivers are encouraged to lift off the throttle when they want to change gear before applying more pressure.

This serves to smooth out the power application and make the engine more responsive and certainly the driver feels more in control of the momentum of the vehicle. If you want to have even more control, steering wheel paddles allow the driver to over-ride the system and choose gears manually - ideal if you need a sudden burst of acceleration such as on rapid overtaking.

Spotting the full hybrid version from other Vitara's isn't easy as Suzuki has retained the basic body styling they introduced in 2019 and refined in 2020 when the 48 V Hybrid technology was fitted as standard across the range.

Visually the Vitara appears as a basic and functional box with its clamshell bonnet and trapezoid styled front bumper which, while not offensive, lacks a little in individual personality.

Inside there is good use of the space and the versatile rear seating configuration will be appreciated by those who need to carry large loads rather than passengers - the luggage capacity varying from 289 litres (10.21 cu.ft) to 642 litres (22.67 cu.ft).



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One of the features I particularly appreciate is that Suzuki has kept the dashboard and instrumentation very simple – some of the modern hybrid vehicles try to pack in so much information that the instrumentation can be distracting.

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For the £30,000 you are going to have to pay to acquire this particular model in SZ5 trim you get a lot of kit including: 17in alloy wheels, suede upholstery, front and rear parking sensors, Traffic Sign Recognition, Adaptive Cruise Control, automatic air conditioning, automatic headlights, double sliding panoramic sunroof, satellite navigation, Bluetooth connection and smartphone link.

On the Road

With the modest amount of power on tap the Vitara doesn't have the most sophisticated chassis and running gear so Suzuki sticks with robust components such as the MacPherson front and beam rear suspension for a comfortable ride.

It is undemanding to handle with sufficient feedback from the assisted steering to describe it as competent while lacking the pin-sharp responses of a more sporting SUV – but then this isn't the target market for the Vitara.

VERDICT

The Vitara may not be the most stylish of sport utilities but it is very practical, easy and relaxing to drive and with the self-charging hybrid system should help to stretch petrol consumption in these high price times and cut emissions.



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Wheels-Alive Tech Spec. in Brief:

Vehicle: Suzuki Vitara Hybrid SZ5 ALLGRIP



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Engine: 1462cc petrol & 24.6 kW electric motor

Transmission: Six-speed automated manual

Power: 115 bhp @ 6,000rpm

Torque: 138 Nm (102 lb.ft) @ 4,400rpm

Performance:

0 - 62 mph: 13.5 seconds



Top Speed: 111 mph

Fuel Consumption (WLTP Official Figures):

Low: 47.9 mpg

Medium: 52.2 mpg

High: 57 mpg

Extra High: 41.5 mpg

Combined: 48.4 mpg

CO2 Emissions: 132 g/km

Price (On the Road), as tested: £30,134