A New Year, A New Suzuki Vitara S 1.4 BOOSTERJET Compact SUV

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David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) drives the new range topping Vitara

On sale from January 2016 is the latest addition to the Suzuki Vitara compact five door SUV range. The new Vitara range was launched eight months ago when it replaced the larger, durable, tough, well-liked and long serving 4×4 Grand Vitara range.

Now there is an additional model in the softer styled SUV Vitara range – the 1.4-litre S turbocharged 'BOOSTERJET' model. It has a direct injection four cylinder petrol engine which produces 140 hp. It currently is only available with one higher S level of specification and costs a weighty £20,899 with six-speed manual transmission. In six-speed automatic gearbox form it costs £22,249. This auto transmission also has a manual mode operated by

shift paddles behind the steering wheel. Both variants have Suzuki's intelligent AllGrip traction system as standard, with Auto, Sport, Snow and Lock modes plus Descent Control.

The top level S specification completes the Vitara range of four grades – SZ4, SZ-T and SZ5. The new 1.4 litre direct injection 140 hp/220 Nm petrol turbocharged engine joins the existing 1.6 litre multipoint 120 hp/156 Nm petrol and 1.6-litre 120 hp/320 Nm turbodiesel units in the 2016 range. Prices for 1.6 litre petrol version start from an attractive £13,999 and 1.6 diesel versions start from £17,499, both of which appear to make the new 1.4-litre engine models look expensive.

But look behind the headline priced versions and a current top spec 1.6 litre petrol automatic with AllGrip traction is priced at £21,649 and that is only £600 less than the more powerful and higher specification 1.4 turbo S BOOSTERJET auto with AllGrip. A top spec 1.6 diesel manual with AllGrip, no auto option is available yet, costs £450 less than the new 1.4 petrol auto.

So which versions will UK customers buy of the new Suzuki Vitara range in 2016? The company anticipates 66% will stay with the lower priced 1.6 petrol, 20% will choose the 1.6 diesel engine and 14% will opt for the higher performance and specification offered by the new 1.4 BOOSTERJET petrol versions.

Since its launch eight months ago around 6,000 new Vitaras have been sold in the UK, mostly to retail customers. Industry wise, sales of the wide ranging models with 2WD/4WD options in the Crossover/SUV/Dual Purpose/4x4s segment have shown the fastest growth of any new car sales sector in the UK in recent years. In 2014 close to 300,000 were sold and in 2015 the figure is expected to be at least 25% higher, driven by customer demands and the increase in the number of new models being introduced by manufacturers. The worsening conditions of our UK roads, the unpredictable weather and the perceived status of owning an SUV styled vehicle have all added to the changes in our motoring requirements.

The mainstream Vitara version's most likely competitors will be the Nissan Juke, Vauxhall Mokka and Renault Captur. However, with the higher price of the 1.4 S versions, the slightly larger Renault Kadjar, Honda HR-V and Mazda CX-3 are also competitors, but there are many others.

Before reviewing the new Vitara S 1.4 model, to recap I first tried the new range at its launch in May last year and found the newcomer to be generally well put together with a good level of standard equipment and attractively priced. The 1.6-litre normally aspirated petrol engine with a five-speed manual gearbox was a bit dull but adequate and appealed because of its lower purchase price. The 1.6-litre turbodiesel with its six-speed manual gearbox I preferred because it was livelier with more torquey, so it made driving that bit more responsive and the fuel economy was better in real-life driving conditions. Personally, living in the countryside on top of The Cotswolds, I would always opt for the AllGrip system for both engines – although it costs an extra £1,800 – to ensure that whatever the road conditions are I can keep mobile.



Move forward to the new 1.4 S turbocharged petrol version and this offers, 17% more power, 41% more torque and a 4% improvement in fuel economy over the naturally aspirated 1.6-litre petrol unit. It is just a pity that this engine is only offered in a new high S spec level.

Another downside is that this new engine requires servicing every 9,000 miles whilst the 1.6 petrol and diesel models have 12,500 mile service intervals, so not only does it cost more to buy, but it also costs more to run. All versions are covered by a three-year/60,000 mile warranty.

The 220 Nm of torque from 1,500 to 4,000 rpm makes this new 1.4 litre turbocharged petrol engine responsive and injects a good deal more life into performance. It pulls strongly from low rpm right through until 4,000 rpm and then the response falls away and the engine becomes noisy. But by that time zero to 62mph has taken only 10.2 seconds and top speed is 124mph. These figures are the same for manual and auto versions.

As for fuel economy the official Combined Cycle figure for the manual is 52.3mpg and the auto is 51.3mpg. In my test driving time, covering all types of roads from wind battered motorways to rain sodden country roads and traffic congested post Christmas in-town traffic, my test driving returned 39.6mpg overall with the automatic version. The all-important CO2 emission figures are 127 g/km for the manual and 128 g/km for the auto so VED road tax is £0 for the First Year, with the rate increasing to £110 for Year Two onwards.

Company car drivers will pay 20% Benefit-in-Kind tax for both version but 22% from April 2016 when all road taxes change for all new cars.

PERFORMANCE…

Mated with the smooth auto gearbox the new engine provided fuss-free stop-start driving response and a good turn of speed on the open road. It is a nice combination but costlier to buy and run compared to its 1.6-litre petrol and diesel alternative Vitara engine options.

The S specification level, apart from a new turbo petrol engine, receives some changes to the suspension in line with its more sporting image. The ride is a shade firmer due to a stiffer suspension setup used for improved body control during cornering at higher speeds. It is not too harsh to put off would-be buyers – as we know, ride comfort has become a major

consideration for the UK's new car customers. Even with the 17-inch gloss-black alloy wheels the ride is very acceptable and only on poorer road surfaces such as motorway concrete sections with bitumen expansion joints is the ride comfort interrupted.

At 4,175 mm (13.70 ft) in length the Vitara sits in the compact SUV segment with five doors and seating for four adults, perhaps five passengers if children use the rear seats. The seats are generally comfortable although the front seat squabs are on the small side. The driving position and visibility front and rear was good. There is a modest 375 litre (13.24 cu.ft) boot which goes up to 710 litres (25.07 cu.ft) with the rear seats folded down. For those that need to tow the braked towing weight capacity is 1,200 kg (2,645 lb).

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Standard equipment for all Vitara models includes seven airbags, alloy wheels, DAB radio with USB and Bluetooth connectivity, cruise control with speed limiter, air conditioning and front and rear electric windows. As a visual difference the S variant, in addition to the gloss black wheels, has its own unique design grille, satin silver door mirror covers, LED headlights, rear upper spoiler and black side body mouldings.

Inside the sports theme continues, with red stitching for the suede seat upholstery, red accents for the air conditioning vents and instruments and there are alloy pedals. The carry-over spec from the SZ5 and other spec levels includes 60/40 split folding rear seat, navigation system, on-board computer, touchscreen, automatic headlight levelling, front and rear parking sensors, radar brake distance alert and keyless entry with push-button start.

On the demerit side there is no spare wheel – just an inflation kit, which for a SUV is not ideal, and the infotainment and sat-nav system is operated via the touchscreen – which is logical to use but slow to respond. I also found both the dipped and full-beam headlights were set too low by the automatic levelling system so driving in bad weather at night was not a pleasant experience.

For those would-be Suzuki Vitara owners that crave more performance the new S 1.4-litre

turbo petrol model will appeal especially with manual and auto gearbox options and its standard AllGrip traction system. But offering this engine with a lower level of specification, so reducing its price, would appeal to even more potential owners.

VERDICT

For: Willing new turbo petrol engine, responsive low down torque output, AllGrip 4×4 traction, smooth auto gearbox, high spec level, sports style interior.

Against: New engine only available with top level S spec, servicing intervals are shorter than the other Suzuki 1.6 petrol/diesel engine options, Combined Cycle real-life fuel economy was much lower than the official figure, automatic levelling headlight beams are set too low for main or dipped modes, slow touchscreen operation, no spare wheel.



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

Suzuki Vitara S 1.4 BOOSTERJET auto with AllGrip control, compact 5 door SUV.

Engine: 1.4 litre, 4 cylinder, turbocharged direct injection petrol

Power: 140 PS @ 5,500 rpm

Torque: 220 Nm (162 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm to 4,000 rpm

Transmission: 6 speed automatic with AllGrip 4×4 traction.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 10.2 seconds

Top speed: 124 mph

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 51.3 mpg (39.6 mpg on test).

Emissions/road tax: CO2 128 g/km, VED road tax £0 First Year rate, then £110 onwards. BIK company car tax 20%.

Insurance group: 16E.

Warranty: 3 years/60,000 miles.

Service intervals: 9,000 miles (other engines in the range 12,500 miles).
Dimensions/capacities: L 4,175 mm (13.70 ft), W 1,775 mm (5,82 ft). H 1,610 mm (5.28 ft), boot/load space 375 to 710 litres (13.24 to 25.07 cu.ft), 5 doors/5 seats, braked towing capacity 1,200 kg (2,645 lb).

Price: £22,249.