Latest Suzuki Swift – First impressions with a different, scientific approach...

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New Suzuki makes the running…

Applying science to automotive assessment, the inimitable Dave Randle shares his own fascinating thoughts on Suzuki’s newcomer.

As a classicist, I naturally turned to Swift for a quote that would do justice to the latest automotive bearer of that name. The best I could come up with was: ‘You’re lucky enough to be different, never change,’ which, while it’s true in spirit, could be improved upon. But then, Taylor is only young yet.

Suzuki’s Swift certainly has always been different, though it owes little to luck. Its looks have always stood out from the crowd; it has always expressed that kind of sportiness that inspires enthusiasm from even classic car wallers and it has always remained slightly removed from the mainstream, while evolving markedly, albeit mainly under the skin.

I well remember that the main thing that struck me about my first test example, twenty odd years ago was that, under that skin, Suzuki had chosen their own solutions. At a time when, as now with the rash of lookalike SUVs, everyone was vying to have the most buyable hot

hatch (people used to buy cars back then – yes, really), the Suzuki contender had enough of a different shape; it didn't look so much like a compromise, and it didn't ride like a dog cart.

By then the general migration to McPherson strut front and torsion bar and trailing arm rear suspension was almost complete, but Suzuki held on to a more complex and much more successful arrangement until they could get the same results with the cheaper option.

All those years on, the problem is long since solved and, while competitors bounce and drop their rear wheels from a great height after speed bumps, the Japanese firm seems to have adopted the economic solution without loss of dignity, mainly by prioritisation and consultation in those regions of the developing world where the quality of the roads is at its most lamentable. Cue 'Rule Britannia'.

That being said, we motoring writers were privileged to try the latest incarnation on the near miraculous roads of Provence and Monaco which, though well-maintained and smoothly surfaced, still provide a serious challenge for both motor and chassis.

The motor in our case

was the Suzuki version of the increasingly ubiquitous three-cylinder petrol concept, the one-litre Boosterjet. Another great leap forward in the long and glorious history of the internal combustion engine. These engines punch so far above their size and weight that they have once more left alternative power sources on the canvas and out for the count.

Apparently, if you think of a number somewhere around a thousand to twelve hundred cubic centimetres and divide it by three you wind up with an ideal ratio of power to cylinder capacity. It's a physics thing that can only be determined with the aid of computer models. If you add that to all the electronic wizardry that has optimised ignition, timing and management over the last couple of decades, it becomes more and more clear that fuel cells and other alchemical pursuits are trying to solve a 'wasness' that no longer is.

If you further include a bit of good old-fashioned technology in the form of an outsize (or overweight) flywheel, you approach physical perfection. Once you got its little flat twin going, a 2CV would tow a thirty foot boat trailer because it was spinning a big heavy flywheel and the flywheel was providing the torque and the motive power to the wheels. Bravo messrs. Newton, Da Vinci and Lefebvre.

The great leap forward with the Suzuki and similar units is that the process seems natural and seamless. Even with a body much larger than that of the Swift, power delivery is enjoyably smooth across the rev and torque ranges with the impeccably managed turbo stocking plenty of oomph without lag, let or hindrance.

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The pay-off for a decent ride can often be hippopotamus quantities of wallow. Again thank the meddlings of Sir Isaac. If you provide sufficient resistance to prevent pitch and roll from the suspended object you obviate or minimise the advantages of having anything flexible between yourself and the planet surface. Hence the tendency for one department to develop a pliant ride at the wheels and another to destroy the whole effect with rigor mortis anti-roll bars.

Enter Pythagoras and Euclid, specialists in the French curve and other esoteric lore.

You might have noticed that these days when you apply the anchors precipitately, not only does anti-lock technology keep you on the straight and narrow, but the whole car doesn't pitch forward and hurl your nodding dog from the parcel shelf through the nav screen. This triumph was not brought about by mechanical resistance, but by adjusting the angle at which the front suspension compresses so that it is no longer subject to the parasitic force of the arrested centre of gravity – anti-dive technology. The effort to go forward is dissipated by the brakes alone and not directed via the front axle geometry downwards toward the road.

Similarly the angles needed to absorb bumps and troughs in the road are not necessarily on the same plane as the sideways thrust occasioned by cornering, so a small separation in these angles can make a big difference in the compromise between ride quality and dynamics.

In the latest Swift I would say the compromise is as close as I have found to the ideal. Really pushing the car was not possible thanks to other people's insistence on being on the bits of road we wanted to use, but the neutrality and progressive quality of all aspects of its performance impressed my co-driver and myself at every turn – and even on the one straight bit.

Controls are where you want them – gear selection is particularly smooth and slick – visibility is good, seats supportive and forgiving, and a big advantage for me over the first Swifts to come my way is the combination of two-door looks with five door practicality – practicality that extends to a decent boot and accessible rear seats and the visual effect achieved by the old Alfa trick of concealing the rear door handles in a design feature.

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There's plenty of competition in the Swift sector – Fiesta, Corsa and so on – but there's one interesting fact about Suzuki that you might think gives it a bit of an edge over more

mainstream rivals. Naturally potential buyers will be scanning the words of wisdom on the subject written by my colleagues in the motoring press and balancing the various shades of opinion with their own judgements and requirements.

But even motoring journalists are, to one degree or another, human and, although they enjoy swanning about in supercars and limos, most have to have a car of their own.

It was noticeable back in the dark days when Skoda was trying to establish itself as a player rather than comic relief that the scribes who had first hand knowledge of what they were looking at were among the first to see the merits of the case and welcome one into their lives.

DAVE'S VERDICT

I can't do the funny hand movements, but I can give you an insider's tip from the jockeys' enclosure.

Quite a lot of the smart money seems to be on the combination of products and customer attitude of Suzuki.

The new model is under starters orders and the orders are looking good to firm.

See what I did there?

If you are interested in reading Kim's view of the new Swift, including technical specifications, please click HERE.