Latest Suzuki Swift Sport – First Impressions

Published: May 21, 2018

Author: Kim Henson

Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/latest-suzuki-swift-sport-first-impressions/



Kim Henson samples the new Swift Sport…

Suzuki’s eagerly-awaited new lightweight sports supermini goes on sale on 1st June with big savings for U.K. buyers during the first month…

(All words and photographs by Kim Henson).

News: Suzuki sales increasing…

Before talking about the latest Swift Sport, it is interesting to take a brief look at how Suzuki is doing in the UK.

In fact the firm is doing rather well, with record sales of more than 40,000 cars in 2017, and a market share that has increased from 1.42 per cent to 1.59 per cent during that year. Indeed sales are healthy across the range, with a thoroughly modern line-up of attractive, good-to-drive vehicles plus an excellent reliability record attracting customers in increasing numbers. Importantly, in addition to continuing strong sales to private buyers, in percentage terms fleet sales have more than doubled between 2016 and 2017.

Suzuki also says that awareness in the brand among British buyers has increased by 20 per cent during the last three years.

In terms of the multiple award-winning Swift, so far some six million have been sold worldwide.

Although Suzuki is still a relatively small player in terms of the overall UK market, looking at the bigger picture the company is the eighth largest car manufacturer in the world, producing some 3.1 million vehicles each year, or around 8,500 per day!

It is also fascinating to note that the firm is also a major provider of vehicles in India, where it sells 1.4 million cars each year and has a market share of 49.5 per cent…



New Swift Sport

Suzuki's Swift Sport, introduced to British buyers in 2006 (and with second generation models sold here from 2012), has always been a respected contender for those seeking a sporty supermini. Since its introduction, the model has achieved total U.K. sales of 11,535. The company hopes to sell more than 1,500 examples of the new car (the third generation Swift Sport) in its first full year (2019).

The new model was introduced to the Japanese market late in 2017, and was unveiled for European customers at the 2017 Frankfurt Motor Show.

It is believed that from launch the newcomer will appeal to current and former Swift Sport owners, but also that post-launch it will be of interest to ‘conquest’ buyers considering a variety of supermini hot hatches.

Built for Europe in the company’s Sagara factory in Japan, the latest five door Swift Sport has revised frontal styling unique to the model, and the vehicle is lower (by 15mm or just over half an inch) and wider than the outgoing car. It features an aerodynamic front spoiler plus body side skirts.

The car also breaks new ground in terms of its deliberately light in weight but strong in construction body shell, under Suzuki’s ‘HEARTECT’ lightweight platform strategy (introduced in 2015 and so far applied to the Baleno, IGNIS and Swift models). In fact some 70 kg (154 lb) has been shaved off its predecessor’s figure of 1,045 kg (2,304 lb). By my calculations that means a highly impressive reduction of nearly seven per cent.

This doesn’t sound much but it makes big differences in terms of effort required to propel the car, with consequent gains in fuel consumption and emissions, as well as outright performance.

The lightweight body shell is said to incorporate Ultra High tensile steel across 17 per cent of its structure and High tensile steel across four per cent – by design it’s very strong as well as light.

Aerodynamic improvements include a redesigned roof spoiler (which helps to improve tyre contact with the tarmac by minimising lift at high speeds), a new engine undertray, floor undercovers and front intake strakes. Together they help reduce wind resistance by 10 per cent overall, compared with the previous Sport.

Helping in performance terms are Suzuki’s state of the art engine and transmission assemblies. At the heart of the vehicle is the 1.4 litre turbocharged Boosterjet power unit first seen in 2016 in the firm’s Vitara and S-Cross models, where they have gained much acclaim from motoring scribes and buyers alike.

Boosterjet technology, developed by Suzuki, makes use of a small displacement, high torque turbocharger. During heavy load operation the wastegate valve is closed to create higher boost pressure, but remains open in normal driving. Thus pumping losses are minimised, to provide high power and frugal fuel consumption. An air by-pass valve helps to prevent turbo ‘stall’ in situations where the throttle is closed and then quickly re-opened again.



The attachment of the turbocharger directly to the cylinder head, and building the exhaust manifold into the head, help to substantially reduce turbo ‘lag’ (delay in turbo power delivery).

The inclusion of seven hole injectors and high tumble port technologies, plus other

measures, also help to optimise power, emissions and fuel consumption.

This direct injection turbocharged (DITC) motor represents a hefty step forward compared with the previous Swift Sport's engine (itself highly praised). Although the power output of 140 PS (138 bhp) is very similar to that of its predecessor (136 bhp), the maximum torque output of 230 Nm (170 lb.ft), developed between 2,500 and 3,500 rpm, is much greater. In fact this compares with 160 Nm (118 lb.ft) produced at a considerably higher engine speed of 4,400 rpm in the outgoing Swift Sport (and 220 Nm or 162 lb.ft from the engine as used in the Vitara/S-Cross). So on paper at least, while the power developed is similar to that of its predecessor, this latest motor promises a more torquey, less frenetic drive with an improvement in torque output of a massive 44 per cent!

The weight reductions have helped the new car become faster than the one it replaces, and the torque to weight ratio is 4.2 kg/Nm, said to put the new Sport on a similar level in this respect to hot hatch competitor models.

It is said that the new powertrain provides the same levels of power and torque of a much larger capacity (say 2.0 litre) normally-aspirated engine.

Certainly the acceleration figure of 8.1 seconds for the zero to 62 mph sprint is impressive (and 0.6 seconds faster to this speed than its predecessor), and the car has a potential top speed (where permitted) of 130 mph. More importantly this means that at our legal maximum of 70 mph on motorways and dual carriageways, the motor is working relatively effortlessly – good for engine life as well as fuel consumption and smooth progress.



Further changes to the new Sport include the installation of a larger and more efficient radiator, plus a new twin electric fan assembly, also a new, larger capacity sports exhaust system, which exits through twin tailpipes.

To improve the feel of the gearchange (already good), the new gear lever set-up has a 10 per cent shorter throw. Internal changes within the six speed manual gearbox include revised synchromesh assemblies. An uprated clutch unit is also installed.

The suspension has been upgraded compared with the outgoing Sport, notably said to result in reduced roll angles, optimised roll rigidity, greater driving stability and better dynamic

response. High performance Monroe (a registered trade mark of Tenneco Automotive) front shock absorbers/dampers are employed, as in the previous Sport.

The rear trailing arm set-up was developed specifically for the Swift Sport.

The development of the revised suspension was taken very seriously by Suzuki, with more than 100 different damper and spring combinations under consideration before the arrangements were finalised.

To handle the greater performance, compared with standard Swifts, the braking system features large diameter ventilated front discs, while at the rear, solid discs handle the retardation more effectively than before, with a new pad material being employed. This is claimed to have greater fade resistance for improved braking at high temperatures.

Technically interesting too are the 17 inch (larger than before) polished aluminium alloy road wheels. These have been made from a lighter composition alloy than used hitherto, and after the wheel has been cast during manufacture, the rim is compressed and stretched by high pressure rollers (the process is known as ‘flow forming’).

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Very well-equipped

This latest Suzuki is bristling with state-of the-art safety and convenience equipment. Included in its comprehensive standard specification are six airbags, a rear view camera, front fog lamps, Dual Sensor Brake Support (DSBS) Adaptive Cruise Control and Lane Departure Prevention. This last system operates between 37 and 100 mph, where permitted, to activate steering wheel vibration and warning map illumination, and on this new car the driver will also feel automatic steering input to help maintain the vehicle’s correct path on the road. Warnings to the driver are also given if the car is ‘weaving’ from side to side within its lane.

In addition, the car features auto air conditioning, DAB radio with six speakers and Bluetooth, privacy glass, LED headlamps, LED daytime running lights, polished 17 inch aluminium alloy road wheels, electrically-operated rear windows, Smartphone Link Display Audio (SLDA) and a satellite navigation system. The seven inch touch panel display includes a three dimensional navigation map that helps to distinguish landmarks. The system allows the driver to use some smartphone connections with Mirrorlink, Android Auto and Apple CarPlay connection. For using an iPhone, Apple CarPlay facilitates receiving directions for optimised traffic conditions, playing music, accessing e-mails, text messages and so on, as well as making telephone calls!

The new Sport features a sophisticated forward detection system that supports a variety of safety technologies, the main one of these being the collision-mitigating Dual Sensor Brake Support (DSBS) set-up. This operates at speeds between 3 and 62 mph, and if it senses that a forward collision might be likely, it issues audible and visual warnings to the driver. If the risk of collision increases and the driver panics, the system activates brake assist, intervening to increase the braking force.

Buyers can choose between one solid and five metallic paint colours (all included in the car's price), including the exclusive Champion Yellow finish that comes from the Suzuki Works Junior Rally Car. (Just four colours were offered on the outgoing Sport).

The welcoming interior features unique Sport trim, incorporating semi-bucket type front seats, a leather-trimmed steering wheel and red accents on the dash and console areas.

The car is to be launched in the UK on 1st June, and for the whole of June this year will be priced at £1,500 below its normal selling figure of £17,999 – so initially comes in at £16,499. Suzuki says that a low deposit, 'affordable' PCP (Personal Contract Purchase) will also be announced, closer to the launch date.

Deliberately, there is just one version of the Swift Sport, with one comprehensive trim level and no options. While, for the new car, the 'On the Road' price has increased compared with

the predecessor model (£17,999 after the June 2018 special offer of £16,499 finishes, compared with £15,249 for the previous Sport), the price differential for the Sport over the top specification ‘standard’ Swift remains similar to that of the previous car.

It is also interesting to look at the prices of would-be competitor models, including (for example) the Peugeot 208 GTi (£17,999), Renault Clio RS (£20,295) and Vauxhall Corsa VXR (£20,155). In addition many of the features that come as standard with the Swift Sport are extra-cost options or not available at all on some rival models.

For customers interested in Personal Contract Purchase, Suzuki says that the company will provide a special offer allowance of £750 towards the cost, so buyers would need to provide a deposit of £2,500, the pay £199 per month over 49 months.



On the

Road

As with the standard ‘new’ Swift model that I sampled last year, I found that the Swift Sport provides similar interior space (with generous head room throughout and reasonable leg room, even for rear seat occupants) and a good-size boot for a compact vehicle (in fact, as with the standard cars, the boot on the latest Sport is considerably bigger than in the outgoing model).

All four passenger doors open wide for easy entry to and exit from the car.

I was impressed by the comfort of the semi-bucket type front seats, which also proved to be good at holding their occupants in place during spirited motoring.

There are plenty of useful stowage spaces around the interior, including four bottle holders (in the doors).

The engine is a gem. It’s smooth-running, quiet (with a subdued and happy burble becoming evident when accelerating hard) and eager to perform.

The delivery of bags of torque across a very wide rev range helped to make the car a delight to drive, from low rpm (it pulled strongly from around 1,400 rpm) through mid-range and higher speeds too.

Acceleration felt rapid, from rest and especially when on the move. The ability to gain speed rapidly when overtaking, for example, was appreciated by this driver in minimising time on the ‘wrong’ side of the road.

Hill-climbing was impressive too, and in-town driving was a doddle. In both cases the excellent low speed pulling power was evident, minimising the need to change down a ratio. That said, changing gear was always easy. The revised, shorter-throw gearchange set-up provides a particularly slick change quality, whether changing up or down through the gearbox.

Low speed manoeuvres were easy too, courtesy of a tight turning circle and a good level of power assistance for the driver.

Cruising on the open road was relaxing and enjoyable, with 60 mph requiring an indicated engine speed of just 2,200 rpm.

Rough roads?

The extensive development work on the Sport's suspension has certainly paid off, in my opinion. The test car was nimble, predictable and fun to drive through the twisty bits. To counter this, if I'm honest I was expecting a greater degree of firmness/harshness to be felt through the suspension (as is the case with so many higher performance hatchbacks), especially with the larger diameter 17 inch road wheels. However, I was very pleasantly surprised at just how comfortable the car was over the rough surfaces so often encountered these days. I feel that the Suzuki engineers have done a great job in this respect, and the car is comfortable for passengers as well as being impressive to drive.

I should add that the revised brakes delivered reassuring retardation and feel in all the road conditions I encountered, including descending steep hills, and when slowing from higher speeds.



Thirsty?

The new Swift Sport is the first Suzuki to be assessed for fuel consumption figures under the 'Worldwide Harmonized Light-Duty Vehicles Test Procedure' or WLTP regulations (intended to give a more realistic idea of likely consumption than the previous/current NEDC –'New European Driving Cycle' – figures). For the new car, the official 'Combined' figure is 50.4 mpg under the NEDC regime, or 47.1 mpg applying the new WLTP system. Interestingly, during my test drive of 80 miles on a mixture of roads in Somerset and north Wiltshire, the car's on-board computer showed an overall figure 46.0 mpg, and for the first 46 miles of the drive, it had calculated an average figure of 47.4 mpg (in fact, pretty close to the Combined figure achieved by both testing regimes!).

For a sporty machine powered by a turbocharged petrol engine, these figures are excellent.

VERDICT

Having driven the ‘standard’ Swift a year or so ago, and having reported very favourably on that car, I was expecting to find that the Sport version would be equally good. In fact, it isn’t, but only because it is even better!

It retains the five door practicality of the less potent Swifts, it’s comfortable in terms of its seats and the ride quality, and it’s reasonably spacious.

The wonderful 1.4 litre Boosterjet engine (which I have found to be excellent in other Suzuki models too) provides sporty performance and endows the car with superb flexibility – and it’s as happy pottering along in traffic when required, as it is cruising over long distances on the open road, while sipping fuel.

In addition, when road conditions allow, it’s a joy to apply a little more ‘welly’ and feel the car just pulling, and pulling effortlessly, even from low speeds, as the speedo needle climbs. However, as well as being exhilarating to drive, the car feels reassuringly safe and sure-footed too.

To sum up, I would be very happy to buy and own one of the latest Swift Sports. Well done Suzuki.



WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC IN BRIEF:

Suzuki Swift Sport five door supermini hatchback

Engine: Four cylinder, 1.4 litre, direct fuel injection turbocharged petrol (Suzuki Boosterjet)

Transmission: Six speed manual gearbox; front wheel drive.

Power: 140 PS @ 5,500 rpm.

Torque: 230 Nm (170 lb.ft) @ 2,500 to 3,500 rpm.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 8.1 seconds.

Top speed: 130 mph.

Fuel consumption ('Official' figures):

Previous/Current NEDC figure: Combined, 50.4 mpg.

New WLTP figure: Combined, 47.1 mpg.

On test, over 80 miles, average 46.0 mpg.

CO2 Emissions: 125 g/km (NEDC figure); 135 g/km (WLTP figure)

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles, plus One Year Suzuki Assistance, plus 12 years against perforation.

Dimensions: Length 3,890 mm (12.76 ft), Width 1735 mm (5.69 ft), Height 1470 mm (4.82 ft), wheelbase 2,450 mm (8.04 ft), Kerb weight 975 kg (2,150 lb), Luggage capacity 265 to 579 litres (9.36 to 20.45 cu.ft).

Price ('On the Road'): £16,499 (for retail customers for first month on-sale until the end of June 2018, saving £1,500 over normal figure thereafter of £17,999).


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