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Latest Suzuki Swift Sport – Road Test

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FUN ON FOUR WHEELS...

The first two generations of Suzuki's Swift Sport supermini were well-received by the motoring press and buyers... but the latest version is even better!

Kim Henson test-drives the new Swift Sport...

Suzuki's original Swift Sport made its U.K. debut in 2006, with second generation models arriving in 2012, and the car has always been a serious contender in the sporting supermini market.

The latest (third generation) version was introduced to Japanese buyers late in 2017, and for European customers was unveiled at the 2017 Frankfurt Motor Show.



It was felt by Suzuki that the newcomer would be of interest not just to owners of previous versions of the Swift Sport, but also to 'conquest' buyers – likely to be enthusiasts with a variety of supermini hot hatches on their shortlists.

Produced for Europe at the company's Sagara factory in Japan, the latest five door (only) Swift Sport has a revised frontal appearance unique to the new model, and features an aerodynamic front spoiler plus body side skirts. The car is also lower (by 15mm or just over half an inch) and wider than the outgoing model.





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STRONG BUT LIGHT IN WEIGHT

The car features a deliberately light in weight but strong in construction body shell, under Suzuki's 'HEARTECT' lightweight platform strategy (introduced in 2015 and previously applied to the Baleno, IGNIS and Swift models). In total some 70 kg (154 lb) has been trimmed from its predecessor's figure of 1,045 kg (2,304 lb); a highly impressive reduction of nearly seven per cent.

On the face of it this may not sound much, but in fact it makes significant differences in terms of effort required to propel the car, with consequent gains in fuel consumption, emissions and outright performance.



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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 – reinforcing the fact that by design it's very strong as well as light.

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



1.4 LITRE TURBOCHARGED BOOSTERJET ENGINE



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Under the bonnet are Suzuki's state-of-the-art engine and transmission assemblies.

Providing the power is the 1.4 litre turbocharged Boosterjet motor first seen in 2016 in Suzuki's Vitara and S-Cross models, where they have impressed motoring writers and buyers alike.

Boosterjet technology was developed by Suzuki, and at the heart of the set-up is a small displacement, high torque turbocharger. During heavy load operation the wastegate valve is shut to create higher boost pressure, but remains open in normal driving. Pumping losses are thus minimised, to provide optimum power and economical fuel consumption. An air bypass valve helps to prevent turbo 'stall' for driving situations in which 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 together help to substantially reduce turbo 'lag' (i.e. a delay in turbo power delivery).

The adoption 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 great stride forward compared with the previous Swift Sport's engine, although this unit has always been well-liked and well-respected.

Although the power output of the latest engine, at 140 PS (138 bhp), is only marginally slightly more than 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 and of much more significance. 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).

This means that the latest motor promises a more torquey, less frenetic drive, due to the improvement in torque output of a massive 44 per cent!

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

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

The bare figures confirm this, with an acceleration time of 8.1 seconds for the nought to 62 mph dash (in fact 0.6 seconds faster to this speed than its predecessor). In addition the car has a potential top speed (where permitted) of 130 mph.



However, more importantly for real life motoring this means that at our U.K. legal maximum of 70 mph on motorways and dual carriageways, the engine is working relatively effortlessly – this helps to extend engine life as well as minimising fuel consumption and maximising smooth progress.

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

To improve the feel of the already decent gearchange, the new gear lever set-up has a 10 per cent shorter throw than the previous model. Internal changes within the six speed manual gearbox include revised synchromesh assemblies. An uprated clutch unit has also been used.

The suspension has been upgraded compared with the outgoing Sport, 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 having been considered before the arrangements were finalised.

To cope with 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 better than before, with a new pad material being employed. This is claimed to have greater fade resistance for improved braking at high temperatures.

The car is fitted with 17 inch (larger than before) polished aluminium alloy road wheels. These have been constructed 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 (this process being known as 'flow forming').



FULL EQUIPMENT – AS STANDARD

State-of-the-art safety and convenience features abound. For example, included in the new Sport's comprehensive standard specification list are six airbags, a rear view camera, front fog lamps, Dual Sensor Brake Support (DSBS - more of this below), Adaptive Cruise Control and Lane Departure Prevention. This Lane Departure 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 judged by the system to be 'weaving' from side to side within its lane.

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.

The car also features, as standard, automatic air conditioning, a DAB digital 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, also accessing e-mails, text messages and so on, as well as making telephone calls!

Buyers can choose between one solid and five metallic paint colours (unusually these days, all included in the car's price), including the exclusive Champion Yellow finish that was inspired by the Suzuki Works Junior Rally Car. (Note: Just four colours were offered on the previous Sport model).

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



Deliberately, there is just one version of the Swift Sport, with one comprehensive trim level and no options (although extra cost accessories are available). While, for the new car, the 'On the Road' price has increased compared with the predecessor model (quoted as £17,999 after the one-off June 2018 special offer of £16,499 finished, compared with £15,249 for the previous Sport), currently Suzuki is offering a £1,000 'customer saving' deal off the list price, so making the Sport a highly competitive £16,999.

Although the new model is more expensive than the outgoing car, compared with contemporary rivals the Swift Sport's pricing looks very reasonable, in addition to which many of the features and systems that come as standard with the Suzuki are extra-cost



options or not available at all on some opposition models.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Earlier in the year I was able to sample the new Swift Sport for a day, predominantly on country routes, and was impressed by the way it drove.

I have now been test-driving the model over a week of motoring in a variety of everyday situations, ranging from 'round town' local runs to long-distance journeys, taking in dual carriageways and motorways, as well as, necessarily, some city driving (predominantly in central London).

At the outset I should say that as before, personally I like the subtle clean lines of the car; it is sporty without 'shouting', but everyone I encountered agreed that it is a good looking machine. The example I tried this time was finished in 'Super Black Pearl', perhaps not quite as extrovert as the 'Champion Yellow' car in which I had my first experience of the new Sport, but I thought it looked very classy and attractive nevertheless. In fact, in certain lights it seemed to me as if the paintwork was 'liquid' in appearance; very smart and very clever.



Unsurprisingly, since the body shell is essentially the same shape, I found that the Sport provides similar practicality to the less powerful Swift versions. There's generous interior space (with commendable head room throughout and reasonable leg room, even for rear seat passengers).

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All four side doors open wider than usual for easy entry to and exit from the car; I feel that this is a very good feature and not always the case with compact hatchbacks. The design of the vehicle makes it appear, at first glance, to be a three door hatchback, but the external handles for the rear doors are cleverly mounted high up and positioned vertically at the



trailing edges of the doors; very sleek.

I liked the comfort provided over short and long distances by the semi-bucket type front seats, which incorporate side bolsters in the base and backrest, helping to provide positive location for occupants, and good sideways support during motoring on twisty routes.

In addition, the boot is a very handy size for a compact vehicle. As with the standard models, the boot on the latest Sport is considerably bigger than in the outgoing car.

The rear seat is divided two thirds; one third, thus providing a wide range of passenger/load carrying options. In addition, the rear seat backs fold forward onto the seat bases. This results in a horizontal, strong-surfaced platform just a little higher (by 6 inches - 15 cm - or so) than the rearmost, deeper section of the normal boot.

For the record, by my measurements (all approximate) the length of the load compartment, with the rear seat backs folded forwards, is around 55 inches (140cm) with the front seats set in a position that made the driver's seat comfortable for me. The minimum width of the boot is about 39.75 in (101 cm), increasing to 52 inches (132 cm) at its widest point, and I measured the available height beneath the parcel shelf, when in position as being 20.5 inches (52 cm).

I should mention that during my time with the car I was called upon to collect a comprehensive professional sound system set-up, plus musical instruments, from a venue in central London. To my delight, all of it (including speakers, microphone stands, amps, etc.) fitted easily into the Suzuki (with the rear seat backs folded forward and the parcel shelf unclipped and removed - an easy, rapid operation), with room to spare. The photograph shows just some of the gear accommodated on this trip.

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I appreciated too the useful stowage spaces around the Sport's interior, including four bottle holders (one in each door), plus the 'cubby hole' incorporating twin cup holders, just



ahead of the gear lever.



In terms of controls, in addition to the usual array of steering column and dash-mounted switchgear, there's a central touch screen set-up for the radio, satellite navigation system and phone/smart phone functionality. This proved to be easy to operate once the various menus were mastered (there's a comprehensive separate handbook that comes with the car and covering the 'infotainment' functions).

In addition, and in my opinion very sensibly, beneath the touchscreen are found separate rotary controls for the heating and air conditioning systems. This means that the driver does not have to launch into a touch screen menu set-up in order to change (say) the heat



settings; instead this type of alteration is handled by simple, easily assimilated rotary dial controls. (As a general point, I, and many of my motoring writer colleagues, feel that the incorporation, by some motor manufacturers, into touch screen set-ups of most of the car's auxiliary controls can result in confusion and potential danger. This is especially likely if the driver is tempted to take his or her eyes off the road to try to work out the menus etc... and yes I realise that they should stop before so doing!).

While talking of sensible features, personally I am delighted that Suzuki has continued to equip the company's latest models with a traditional mechanically-operated handbrake, rather than an electronic switch set-up. (There has been much discussion lately about the potential safety problems associated with electronic parking brake systems. Some of these are confusing -and even experienced drivers new to a car so fitted can have difficulty in determining whether the brake is applied or not - quite apart from possibly adverse long-term maintenance aspects, and potential difficulties in releasing the brake if the car's battery has been allowed to go 'flat'...). With the Swift Sport the mechanical brake lever is very positive in action and the parking brake was effective on all the slopes (some of them steep!) that I found during my week with the test car.

LOVELY ENGINE

The engine is a delight... truly a gem of a spirited motor. It's 'enthusiastic' (and not at all 'aggressive') in the way that it delivers its considerable performance, but at the same time smooth-running and quiet, apart from a subdued and pleasant burble that is audible but not intrusive under hard acceleration.

The delivery of torque in quantity across a very wide rev range (in fact much more of it, and available from lower engine speeds than in the previous Sport) helped to make the car such fun to drive. It was happy to pull strongly from around 1,400 rpm, and kept on delivering bags of torque/pulling power through mid-range and higher speeds too. This meant that it was just as happy - and easy to drive - when trundling in slow-moving traffic around Picadilly Circus as when the car was 'let loose' on open stretches of country road.



Acceleration was usefully rapid, from rest and particularly noticeable when on the move. I like this ability to gain speed rapidly when required, for example when overtaking, to minimise time on the 'wrong' side of the road.

The car romped up hills too (even with steep gradients involved) and, as already mentioned, was easy and pleasant to drive in town use. In both situations the excellent low speed pulling power was a real boon, minimising the need for downwards ratio changes. Having said that, changing gear when required was never a problem. The revised, shorter-throw gearchange set-up in the new Sport provides a particularly smooth and rapid change quality, in changing up or down through the gears.

Low speed manoeuvres, including parking and turning in very tight spaces, were easy too, thanks to a tight turning circle and a nicely-weighted level of power assistance for the driver.

Cruising at higher speeds proved to be enjoyable and relaxing over long distances, with appreciated mechanical refinement and (for example) 70 mph requiring an indicated engine speed of approximately 2,500 rpm.

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ROUGH WITH THE SMOOTH?

The latest Sport's suspension set-up is the result of much development effort, and I feel that it has certainly paid off.

The test car felt predictable, also it was fun to drive and nimble through the twisty bits. In addition the ride quality was far smoother and more accommodating than I had expected. This was even more of a surprise to me, bearing in mind the new car being equipped with 17 inch road wheels (larger diameter than on the previous model).

In fact I was very pleasantly surprised at just how comfortable the car proved to be for all



occupants over the rough surfaces encountered during my time with the car, both on local and long distance routes.

Well done to the Suzuki engineers.

In addition... The car's revised brakes provided reassuring retardation and feel on all the journeys I made in the car.

MIDNIGHT RIDER

During my time with the Sport I was obliged to cover more than 200 miles during hours of darkness, and found that the headlamps were bright and effective on both dipped and main beam settings. In addition, the instrumentation, which I thought was very clear and unmistakable in daytime, proved to be equally effective at night. The dash illumination was also clear and usefully bright, but not distracting.

While talking of the dash, I should also mention that by scrolling through the car's 'Info' functions, activated by the on-board computer, in addition to the usual 'remaining range' mileage indicator and mpg functions ('instant' and 'average'), enthusiasts will be pleased to find a wide variety of extra information screens. These are easily viewable, as they appear between the two main instruments on the dash. These screens cover 'total driving time', 'total idle stop time' plus 'total idle fuel save' (in terms of miles), a conventional-faced clock, a 'motion' diagram (including front, rear, left and right aspects), a 'torque' and 'power' screen (incorporating rotary diagrams depicting outputs at any specific time), accelerator and brake activation diagrams, and 'boost' (turbocharger operation) together with engine oil temperature. While some may perhaps feel that this approach is a bit 'gimmicky', personally I welcome any information to advise the driver about what's going on under the bonnet... and I did use these screens during my time with the car.

FRUGAL?

The new Swift Sport was the first Suzuki to be assessed for fuel consumption figures under



the 'Worldwide Harmonized Light-Duty Vehicles Test Procedure' or WLTP regulations. These have been established with the aim of providing a more realistic idea of likely consumption than the previous/current NEDC - 'New European Driving Cycle' - figures.

For this model, the official 'Combined' figure is 50.4 mpg under the outgoing NEDC regime, or 47.1 mpg according to the new WLTP system.

During my week and 409 miles of test driving the car, at times enthusiastically over long distances, and including a time-consuming rush-hour crawl for several hours into and through central London, and out again later (an essential journey to collect some substantial sound system equipment), the car's on-board computer recorded an overall figure of 45.0 mpg; just 2.1 mpg short of the official figure, and which I am sure it would have equalled or bettered, but for the London driving... However, even more impressive, during the first 50 miles or so of driving on local built-up area roads in Dorset, the computer was showing an average of better than 47 mpg.

I feel that these figures are excellent, especially bearing in mind the sporty nature of the vehicle.



VERDICT

Terrific. If you are looking for a competent, compact yet internally roomy, comfortable, practical and sporty yet also economical five door hatchback, the Swift Sport should definitely be on your shortlist.

In my experience it does everything well; in particular it provides a sporting drive with high torque levels across a wide rev band (it just pulls, and pulls, and pulls as speed rises...), it handles 'like a go-kart' and is comfortable for all occupants.

Judging by all previous Suzuki models, it should be a winner in the long-term too, in terms of reliability.

Can I find any faults worthy of mention? Actually, no.

Well done Suzuki, in my opinion this car is first class... and represents good value for money too.



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 409 miles, average 45.0 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'): £17,999 (but at the time of writing, early October 2018, subject to a Suzuki 'customer saving' reduction of £1,000, making the price £16,999).