New Suzuki Swift Hybrid – Road Test (plus Suzuki's range electrification plans)

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Kim Henson test drives Suzuki's latest, fourth generation version of its Swift compact supermini…

(Photographs and words by, and copyright, Kim Henson).

Big news from Suzuki is that the firm plans to introduce its first fully electric car later in 2024, with further EV models arriving through to 2030.

In order to make way for the new electric models, Suzuki is discontinuing (by early 2025 or sooner if dealer stocks deplete) the Swift Sport, the Jimny LCV, Ignis and Swace – all much-loved by those who own them. This will leave the hybrid model line-up of Swift, Vitara, S-Cross and Across PHEV.

The recently-introduced new Swift, with its petrol engine, will continue, and the model has been well-received by the motoring press and public alike.

Statistics relating to the Swift tell a remarkable numerical story, with the model having been produced in three previous generations over the last four decades, and with more than nine million examples having been sold in 119 countries around the world.

However, there's much more to this model than just numbers.

During the last few years I have talked to many people who have invested their own cash in a Swift, as well as those in the motor trade who look after these cars in real world use. The overwhelming picture I see is one of satisfaction – in terms of treatment by dealers, long-term reliability, low overall running costs and practicality in everyday motoring.

Now that is a good platform from which to assess the latest, fourth generation Swift. and I have recently had one on road test for a week of mixed driving, including a long drive to, and within, London, with city queues a-plenty!

The new model was first showcased (in Swift Concept form) at the Japan Mobility Show in Tokyo in October 2023, and went on sale in Britain and the Republic of Ireland in April 2024. Examples sold in these markets and across Europe are built in Suzuki's Sagara plant in Japan.

Suzuki is investing in electric power and other routes to reduce dependence on fossil fuels,

but says that, for the moment at least, Swift buyers still prefer petrol power, with some competitor models having been withdrawn from the market in favour of electric cars – thus leaving good opportunities for Swift sales.

This optimism is reflected in sales figure forecasts for the new Swift model… The outgoing Swift was selling at the rate of around 9,400 vehicles per year (15th in its sales league sector), whereas forecasts/ambitions for the new generation model are running at approximately 12,000 units annually, which would take the car into the sales chart top 10.

Latest Swift

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Subtle redesign has updated the exterior and interior of the new model, and standard equipment levels have been upgraded (they were already comprehensive).

External styling changes include ‘blacked-out’ roof pillars (giving the impression of a ‘floating’ roof), a new, piano-black front grille, and L-shaped lamps, also rear hatch and boot side spoilers.

The revised LED headlamps feature an inner lens and light rod set-up, providing a wider appearance when illuminated. Rear combination lamps are of the same design type as those at the front of the vehicle, and when the rear lamps are lit up, they take on a three-dimensional appearance.

A new two-tone approach has been applied to the Swift’s interior, with high quality materials used, and with the centrally-positioned controls angled towards the driver. There’s a new standard-fit nine-inch central infotainment display too, with a built-in navigation system, and all versions come with heated front seats (with revised bolsters and head restraints) – these features apply to all new Swifts.

A geometric pattern upholstery material (‘Melange Grey’ and black cloth) is used in both the

Motion and Ultra models.

Mechanical changes give the new model greater torque, better performance (acceleration to 62 mph from rest is 5 per cent quicker, at 12.5 seconds for the manual versions, 11.9 seconds for CVT variants), improved fuel consumption and lower CO2 emissions.

Suzuki's new Z12E Mild Hybrid 1.2 litre three cylinder engine (with its enhanced, lightweight 12 volt Mild Hybrid system) is used. This develops 82 PS and 112 Nm (83 lb.ft) of torque, while emitting just 99 g/km CO2, and providing fuel consumption up to eight per cent better than the previous K12D motor. The new Combined consumption figure (class-leading) is 64.2 miles per gallon for the manual transmission version.



By comparison with the outgoing K12D engine, consumption improvements have been achieved by optimising cylinder turbulence for more rapid combustion, incorporating an intermediate locking mechanism in the Variable Valve Timing (VVT) intake, and increasing the flow rate of the Exhaust Gas Recirculation (EGR) valve.

Further gains in fuel consumption have been achieved by the new engine being linked with Suzuki's standard-fit enhanced light-in-weight 12 volt self-charging Mild Hybrid system. This uses a 10 Ah lithium-ion battery to improve energy recovery efficiency.

The system incorporates a compact, light-in-weight (under 7 kg or 15 lb) belt-driven unit termed an 'Integrated Starter Generator' (ISG), which operates both as a starter motor and generator. It assists the petrol engine during start off and acceleration, as well as generating electricity through regenerative braking. Its power output is 2.3 kW and torque figure 60 Nm (44 lb.ft).

The built-in 'stop-start' facility cuts the engine when the car is stopped at traffic lights (for example). The belt drive helps to ensure smooth restarting after an automatic engine stop.

The lightweight lithium-ion battery is said to have excellent regenerative efficiency, thereby increasing the frequency of engine assists. It supplies power to the engine, instruments and audio system as well as to the Mild Hybrid system.

There's also a new engine coolant water jacket to optimise temperature control, aided by cylinder cooling jets, effectively eliminating any detonation despite the high compression ratio of 13.9:1, for high combustion efficiency.

Additional gains have been achieved by fitting a pendulum type auxiliary drive belt tensioner, and an electric water pump that maintains coolant flow, whatever the engine speed.

Particulate Number (PN) emissions are minimised by a high porosity three-way catalytic converter and petrol particulate filter termed a Gasoline Particulate Filter (GPF). These deal

with incomplete combustion that can arise with higher compression ratios.

Drive is delivered to the front wheels through a five speed manual gearbox or optionally available CVT (Constantly Variable Transmission) automatic transmission – this auto unit still enables a creditable Combined fuel consumption figure of 60.1 miles per gallon.

The revised five speed manual gearbox has been developed with ratios specifically optimised for the new three cylinder engine, with revisions also made to the synchromesh, gear lever ratio and the lever assembly's spring rate, enhancing gearchange operation and precision.

On CVT versions, the fully automatic electrically-controlled transaxle incorporates a two-stage planetary gear unit and single speed reverse gear. The use of the planetary gear set-up enables the gear ratio ranges to be expanded to provide good response during acceleration and quieter running at higher speeds.

The CVT unit's torque converter is a three element, single step, two phase type, and features an automatically-controlled lock-up mechanism.

The gearchange set-up provides seven 'step gear' programmes and comprises a planetary gear unit, multiple disc type clutch, multiple disc type brake, a steel belt, plus primary and secondary pulleys. On the Ultra version (optionally) fitted with the CVT transmission, the gear programmes can also be selected manually by use of steering column mounted 'paddles'.

Interestingly, the standing start acceleration figures for the CVT transmission versions are better than those for the manual gearbox cars.

Later in 2024 optional ALLGRIP 'Auto' 4WD will be available on Ultra models with manual transmission. This useful option is great for buyers such as country district dwellers requiring the reassurance of all wheel drive, without the need for a specific (and often larger) four wheel drive vehicle.

The new Swift has (deliberately) been built within the same dimensions as the outgoing model, emphasising Suzuki's prowess in producing compact vehicles. The car is just 3.86 metres (12.66 ft) long, and is built on Suzuki's well-respected 'HEARTECT' platform, with a kerb weight of just 949 kg (2,092 lb) for the Motion version fitted with a manual gearbox. The light weight helps performance, fuel consumption and low emissions, of course.

Suspension steering and brakes

Modifications to the existing, and already effective, running gear include the adoption of a thicker front anti-roll bar, plus the inclusion of Teflon sheets in the stabiliser mounts, to increase roll rigidity by reducing friction, thereby improving steering feel and enhancing handling stability.

On two wheel drive versions, the rear suspension stroke has been increased to enable the rear wheels to better follow undulations in road surfaces. Revised suspension bump stops have also been fitted, to improve passenger comfort.

Changes to the Electric Power Steering (EPS) system provide better steering feel, a more linear steering response, and a smoother self-centre action on poor road surfaces.

Amendments to the brake servo unit give a smoother, more linear braking response.

Straightforward two model line-up, with 'Motion' and 'Ultra' grades.

The Motion model, priced from £18,699, is the volume-seller in the range, and its standard specification includes a rear upper spoiler, LED headlamps, 16 inch aluminium alloy road wheels, a nine-inch media display including Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity, Navigation, Adaptive Cruise Control, heated front seats, a rear view camera, rear parking sensors, upgraded Dual Sensor Brake Support, enhanced Traffic Sign Recognition and Blind Spot Monitor, plus keyless entry and start, Driver Monitoring System, Lane Departure Warning and Weaving Alert, plus Rear Cross Traffic Alert.

The latest Swift's safety systems are sophisticated and comprehensive, including an enhanced Dual Sensor Brake Support System that now uses millimetre-wave radar (previously lidar), combined with a monocular camera. This system gives better collision mitigation plus improved visibility at night, in poor weather conditions and at intersections.

The Driver Monitoring System employs a camera (built onto the instrument panel), that monitors the driver's eyes. If it senses that the driver is drowsy or losing concentration it sounds an alarm and displays a warning message on the dash.

Moving up to the Ultra specification (as tested), costing from £19,799, buyers additionally gain 16 inch polished aluminium alloy wheels, automatic air conditioning, a heater outlet for rear seat occupants, plus electric folding door mirrors, with built-in repeater turn signals.

The optionally available (on both models) CVT transmission on both models costs an additional £1,250.

On all new Swifts Suzuki Connect connected services are provided free of charge for three years from registration date. These use the car's Data Communication Module (DCM) and are accessed via a smartphone app. They provide a variety of vehicle-related information.

Suzuki's popular Service Activated Warranty is also offered free of charge after the company's warranty expires and until the car reaches up to seven years/100,000 miles.

If you are thinking of buying, check for special offers from Suzuki – for example, at the time of writing (1st July 2024) 0% APR finance is available.

Important detail changes

The basis for the new Swift is Suzuki's proven 'HEARTECT' platform, developed to be both light in weight and rigid. The much-revised frame for the new car is said to provide enhanced collision safety and has a continuous, smooth, curving form, to help more quickly disperse energy. The use of this latest generation of the platform has helped to minimise the

required size of the engine compartment, thus releasing/maximising available space for passengers and luggage.

Many measures have been applied during development of the new car to reduce ‘NVH’ (Noise, Vibration and Harshness) intrusion. Among these, the new body shell incorporates underbody sound and vibration adhesive, to reduce the transmission of noise and vibration into the car. Structural adhesive has also been applied to the upper body.

In addition, ‘A’ pillar sound baffle plates have been increased in number from two to four, damping panels have been fitted to the floor and dashboard areas, and a heavier grade carpet has been used.

Together, these measures are intended to improve comfort overall, especially when driving on less than smooth surfaces.

A further mechanical innovation has been the development of liquid-filled engine mountings, to minimise vibration when the engine is idling and driving.

Aerodynamic improvements include an underbody spoiler and strakes, a torsion beam cover (Suzuki’s first use of this), a smooth finish front bumper, plus external rear bodywork spoilers.

In addition, the new road wheels have been optimised for aerodynamic performance (the wheel cut-outs are smaller and there’s a disc-shaped outer rim), and the tyres used provide 15 per cent less rolling resistance than those on the previous Swift.



Exterior paintwork is available in a choice of eight metallic colours, plus four two-tone schemes, including the roof painted in either Black Pearl or Grey metallic, depending on the colour scheme chosen.

In the case of the Frontier Blue and Burning Red Pearl Metallic shades, they are given a very vivid depth of colour, thanks to a new three layer process. After electroplating of the bare metal body shell, and the application of primer, a base colour coat is applied, followed by a coat of clear lacquer, then topped by an additional lacquer coat.

Notably, the only colour available within the quoted vehicle price (i.e. without additional cost), is Flame Orange Pearl Metallic. For all other shades, an extra £500 to £700 is payable for single colours (depending on the chosen colour), or £850 for dual tone finishes.

New Swift on test



The Swift test car resting in London.

My test vehicle was an Ultra version with Suzuki's manual five speed gearbox. The On The Road price for this model is £19,799, to which £850 needs to be added for the optional dual tone paint finish – which I couldn't fault. Our test car was finished in Burning Red Pearl Metallic, with a Super Black Pearl roof.

The interior looked and felt high quality too, with comfortable seating plus good head and

leg room for all occupants; rear seat leg room is impressive for a supermini.

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Storage compartments within the car include a deep glovebox, plus door ‘bins’ and bottle holders.



The luggage compartment, accessed from bumper height, is spacious for a compact vehicle and the available platform can be greatly extended when required, by folding the 2/3:1/3 divided rear seat backs. When folded, these don’t sit flush with the floor level, there’s just a

slight ‘step’.

The boot floor is below bumper level, and there’s an additional storage compartment beneath this floor, in which the mobility kit is stored (as there’s no spare wheel).

By my measurements (all approximate), with the rear seats in use the length of the boot is 21 inches (53+ cm), with the height, from the boot floor to the top of the tailgate aperture, being 34.75 inches (88 cm), and the width, between the wheel arches, 40 inches (101.5cm).

With the rear seat backs folded forward, and the front seats set roughly midway on their runners, the available length of the luggage compartment is 52 inches (132 cm).

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Smart and effective

I was impressed by the smart and effective facia layout. I found the central touch screen clear to view and easy to assimilate, as were the main instruments ahead of the driver.



I was also pleased to find separate heating/ventilation controls located beneath the central screen (rather than menu-operated) – good for safety I feel.



Overall refinement has been markedly improved, compared with the previous Swift (which I had always though was good in this respect).

The smooth-running engine was quiet in operation, from idle speed and even when accelerating hard, when it was just possible to detect the unique sound identifying a three cylinder motor, but this was pleasant and in no way intrusive.

I also found the car to be eager in terms of acceleration, both from rest and on the move, and the engine pulled strongly from around 1.500 rpm upwards.

Cruising at 70 mph in top gear was hushed, and accomplished with the rev counter needle indicating just under 3,000 rpm. Incidentally, the manual gearbox is a five speed unit; Suzuki tells me that they feel there's no need for a sixth ratio, and having road-tested this Swift for a week, I agree with them!

The revised gearchange was a joy to use – smooth, slick-changing and rapid between ratios.

The Swift ride quality was impressive too; it rode smoothly and quietly over all surface imperfections, without transmitting the suspension's motion harshly to the interior.

I also found that the steering feel was positive at all speeds – light when carrying out low speed manouvres yet responsive at high speeds.

I felt that overall ride and handling qualities were excellent, especially for a compact car. Braking was reassuringly good too, and personally I liked the fact that the Swift has a traditional mechanical handbrake lever.

This tester appreciated the effective screen washers and wipers, and the admirable headlamp illumination and projection, particularly good on main beam.

Top of the class fuel consumption

I have road-tested many cars in my time, but the overall fuel consumption achieved with this Swift was significantly better than any other model I have ever test-driven, with the exception of a diesel-powered Honda 1.6 (2014).

Over 360+ miles of real world motoring, which included long, slow queues in London and elsewhere, as well as cross-country and long journeys, the petrol consumption from my Swift test car worked out at an astonishly good 68.9 miles per gallon, according to the on-board computer. At times (before those queues), the average indicated was 70+ mpg.

That's considerably better than the official 'Combined' figure of 64.2 miles per gallon.



I have no doubt that better than 70 miles per gallon can be achieved in a Swift, in normal everyday motoring.

VERDICT

Brilliant.

The new Swift has been improved in many ways compared with its already good predecessor, and represents a great deal of motor car for your money.

This is especially the case when the comprehensive levels of standard specification are considered (there’s no need to wade through costly options lists as with some manufacturers, since apart from paint choices and transmission type, everything’s included!).

It’s very cost-effective to run too, notably with a genuine capability of returning around 70 mpg in everyday motoring; outstanding!


SWIFT
KR24 XUN

WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC IN BRIEF:

Suzuki Swift Ultra five door supermini hatchback, manual


KR24 KUN

Engine: Three cylinder, 12 valve 1.2 litre (1197cc), Euro 6D petrol, multipoint fuel injection

Transmission: Five speed manual gearbox (CVT option); front wheel drive (optional 4WD from late 2024).

Power: 82 PS @ 5,750 rpm.

Torque: 112 Nm (83 lb.ft) @ 4,500 rpm.

Performance (with manual transmission):

0 – 62 mph: 12.5 seconds.

Top speed: 103 mph.

Fuel consumption (with manual transmission):

Official Combined (WLTP), 64.2 mpg.

Actual figure achieved on test, average 68.9 mpg.

Fuel tank capacity: 37 litres (8.14 gallons)

Approximate range at actual consumption achieved on test: 560 miles

CO2 Emissions (WLTP): 99 g/km (WLTP figure)

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

Note: Suzuki’s Service Activated Warranty is also offered free of charge after the

company’s three year warranty expires, and until the car reaches up to seven years/100,000 miles (whichever comes first). Cars serviced by a Suzuki dealer are covered by complimentary warranty (which covers major components) until the next scheduled service. Fresh cover is provided on each occasion when a scheduled service takes place, up to the age/mileage limit.

(This applies to Suzukis up to seven years old, even those without a full service history, or those purchased privately. It is transferable to a new owner if the car changes hands within the seven year qualifying period).

Dimensions:

Length: 3,860 mm (12.66 ft)

Width: 1,735 mm (5.69 ft)

Height, 2WD: 1,495 mm (4.90 ft)

Height, 4WD 1,520 mm (4.99 ft)

Wheelbase: 2,450 mm (8.04 ft)

Turning circle (min.). 9.6 metres (31.5 ft)

Wheels and tyres: 16 inch aluminium alloy wheels, shod with 185/55R16 tyres

Luggage capacity (VDA):

Seatback raised, 265 litres (9.36 cu.ft)

Seatback folded, 589 litres (20.80 cu.ft.)

Kerb weight inc. full options: 949 kg (2,092 lb.)

Max. braked towing weight: 1,000 kg (2,204 lb.)

Price (‘On the Road’):

Motion: From £18,699

Ultra: From £19,799

CVT transmission: Add £1,250

Alternative paint colours: Please see text.

My Ultra test vehicle: £19,799 plus £850 for the dual tone paint finish, making £20,649 in total.