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Suzuki celebrates 70 years of the Suzulight – the firm's very first car

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Suzuki's first car arrived 70 years ago

Suzuki tells us:

(All words and photographs from Suzuki).

This Autumn, as Suzuki gets ready to launch e Vitara, it's very first electric vehicle, it's well worth reflecting on where it all began for Suzuki Motor Corporation 70 years ago. Back in the Autumn of 1955, Michio Suzuki personally delivered a Suzulight, his very first production car to a local doctor who had previously been conducting his house calls on a bicycle.

Although Michio Suzuki had first started in business much earlier than that in March 1920 with the manufacture of textile looms. These became more advanced in design and very popular right through to the



early 1950s when there was a global decline in the cotton industry; Suzuki then decided to diversify into motorised transport with introduction of its first motorcycle in 1953 and the first car followed two years later.

Initial research and development of Suzulight began as far back as 1937 although this had to be shelved later with the outbreak of the second World War. This development finally resumed in 1954 when Suzuki Motor Co Limited was formed.

Using Suzuki's 'Yaramaika' spirit, (translated as 'Let's do it') which was deep in the root of the Enshu region where Suzuki originated together with his determination to drive forward, Michio Suzuki quickly began researching vehicles produced overseas and gained a wealth of knowledge.

Suzulight was a compact vehicle measuring less than three metres in length and weighing just over 500kg. It was powered by a 360cc, 15PS two cylinder, two-stroke engine which was the first of its type to ever be fitted to a car. It was also the first car in Japan to feature a Front Wheel Drive / Front engine layout and was way ahead of its time with its independent coil spring suspension and rack and pinion steering.

Suzulight easily met the Japanese 'Keijidosha' or Kei light car legislation and Suzuki and his team quickly began their first development road testing of it. As a prototype, its most memorable early drive was a 300km trip across the Hakone mountainous region between Hamamatsu and Tokyo which proved very challenging on roads that had not yet been paved. Although arriving very late in the evening, the team arrived to present the car to the President of 'Yanase Auto' Japan's leading authority on Automobiles.

The President had stayed on late to greet the team and made his way out to thoroughly test the car. Several hours later he returned very impressed and immediately gave Suzuki full approval to put the Suzulight into production. Production commenced in October 1955 with initial production of 3-4 cars per month but by early 1956 monthly volume had climbed to 30 units.

70 years on, Suzuki Motor Corporation remains globally renowned as the 'small car experts' and produces well over three million units per year with a projection of four million units annually by 2030. Michio Suzuki's original strategy of design and production of lightweight vehicles lives on with platforms including 'Heartect' used in Swift, Vitara and S-Cross models and 'Heartect-e' which was specifically designed for e Vitara.



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Michio Suzuki and Development Team for the Suzulight, in 1954.