

Suzuki Swace Motion – Road Test

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Author:

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Kieron Fennelly puts the Motion version of Suzuki's stylish Swace through its paces...

In 2019, Toyota and Suzuki signed a technology-sharing agreement. For Toyota, the interest was Suzuki's small car expertise, while Suzuki gained access to Toyota's electric drive knowhow. In marketing terms, the agreement has spurred several 'new' models for both



parties: Certain Suzukis are badged Toyotas in market such as India and east Africa where Suzuki is especially strong, and reciprocally Suzuki is selling a couple of rebadged Toyotas in territories such as the British Isles where it lacks a medium-size car presence. The first of these was the Suzuki Across, based on the Toyota RAV 4, tested previously in these pages, and the second is the Suzuki Swace.

To all intents and purposes, the Swace is a UK-built Toyota Corolla estate car with a slightly different radiator grille. Whereas the Corolla offers a full range, the Swace which is coming off the line at Burnaston, Derbyshire, at the rate of 2000pa, is available only as a five-door estate and in two trim levels. Motion (the version tested here) is priced (in UK) at £29,000, and Ultra at £30,800, both below the Corolla. The Swace is then a conventional front-wheel-drive hybrid: Its 1.8 petrol engine is augmented by an electric motor driving through an (automatic) CVT gearbox. Because there are no mechanical gearshifts as such, a continuously variable transmission provides particularly smooth acceleration thanks to the infinitely variable belt drive. Think of a bicycle with a seven-speed cog, then replace the cog with a cone and the chain with a belt where the belt moves up or down depending on whether a low or high ratio is required. On very small throttle openings, the Swace will run on battery power alone, useful when driving in stop-go traffic or when manoeuvring, otherwise the electric motor is contributing about a quarter more power to the engine meaning the latter is able to work less hard. The attraction of this configuration is refinement and notable mpg. At 70 mph, the Swace, which is a medium-size five-seat estate car, records an impressive 59 mpg and if you can bear to travel 10 mph slower, an average of 65 mpg is possible. Even in intense traffic mpg does not seem to fall much towards 50 mpg. A full load and headwinds will of course drag these figures down perhaps 10%, but it is still remarkable economy and you do begin to wonder why Europe has persisted with smelly diesel cars for so long.

In terms of appearance, the Swace tends to look like every other car on the road, but at least it is not another SUV, and its carrying capacity is at least equal to and probably greater than many medium-size (and more expensive) SUVs. It's a generous five-seater – for its class the rear seat has impressive legroom; the cabin is comfortable and quiet.



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The suspension is a compromise between firmness and comfort: there is enough suppleness to ensure reasonable comfort and insulation for passengers, yet the Swace retains a degree of body control which means it handles acceptably on winding, uneven roads. Such conditions though are not its forte, but while *in extremis* it will still hold on to the road, even the least sympathetic driver would be unlikely to subject it to such treatment.

The very nature of the Swace encourages smooth progress, aided by the automatic gearbox which even in 'sport' mode is a model of decorum. Indeed, the prospect of 65 mpg is sufficient to ensure most drivers find the Swace's natural gait and simply adapt their driving styles to it.

With a combined 140 bhp to move 1,425 kg (3,142 lb), the Swace is no ball of fire, but the unobtrusive way it gets on with the job is both impressive and relaxing, the petrol engine only really audible under acceleration and faint though unfamiliar sounds from the transmission let the driver know the belts are working hard. The steering is light with that typical remote electric steering feel, but it is accurate enough and brakes are progressive. Visibility from the driver's seat is good, though the slightly afterthought-looking and rather small touch screen is slightly obtrusive. In fact the entire dashboard layout looks a shade old fashioned, but on the other hand it is simple and the driver is not overwhelmed by a plethora of functionality and options he or she is unlikely ever to use, and the Swace's very simplicity is attractive.

Such items as electrically folding door mirrors and separate driver and passenger air conditioning are standard. The only serious criticism is the anachronistic touch screen which needs be wider and set lower and be altogether more intuitive. It does though have a very effective widescreen reversing camera. Fit and finish of cabin materials are correct this is a car from the budget end of the Toyota Corolla range, and probably hard-wearing. The upholstery in grey cloth has a decent quality weave though dashboard and door interiors are finished in slightly hard-looking plastics; above all the Swace's interior appears



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functional, though not unwelcoming.





Front seat comfort is excellent and the driving position such that even after five hours at the wheel, the driver experiences no stiffness or discomfort. The slightly high window line means rear seat passengers unless tall cannot see out especially well, but the seats are well-shaped. The boot with its double floor is capacious: with the rear seats folded, the loading platform is a useful 1.860 m (6.10 ft) long.

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VERDICT

An unremarkable car, the Suzuki Swace distinguishes itself by being so easy-going yet completely practical. Pleasant if unexciting to drive, spacious, unobtrusive and remarkably



economical, the Swace makes a virtue out of being simple, offering running costs no worse than an electric car, yet not requiring the complex infrastructure needed (not to say secure power supply) to operate the latter. With concerns growing about who controls the availability of lithium, there is growing debate about an all-electric future for personal mobility and when manufacturers can build hybrids of the quality and economy of the Swace/Corolla, it is little surprise they are lobbying Brussels to lift the arbitrarily legislated ban on hybrid sales from 2035.



Suzuki Swace Specification

Engine: 4 cylinder 1798cc fuel injection



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Electric motor: 70 kW. Combined combustion & electrical power: 140 bhp

Transmission: automatic. (Continuously variable transmission)

Tyres & wheels: 205×55 R16

Weight: 1,420 kg (3,142 lb)

Performance:

Acceleration: 0 – 100 kph (62 mph): 9.4 s

Max speed 112 mph/180 kph

Economy: 62.7 mpg (WLTP figure combined urban & motorway)

CO2 emissions: 102g/km

Price: From £29,000.