Suzuki Swace SZ5 – Road Test

Published: December 3, 2021

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/suzuki-swace-sz5-road-test/



Estate of the art… Kim Henson test drives Suzuki's Swace, in SZ5 form.

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These days SUVs predominate in the family car market, but for many buyers an estate car has greater appeal in terms of aesthetics and for its arguably more user-friendly

combination of passenger and load carrying abilities. A recent newcomer (from November 2020) to the estate car market is Suzuki's British-built Swace, a result of collaboration between Toyota and Suzuki, and based on the Corolla hybrid estate, but with distinctive Suzuki touches, including the frontal appearance. Interestingly, this model is exported from the U.K. to Europe.

On paper the dynamically-styled Swace represents a very positive fusion of thinking between two manufacturers known for their reliable, well-engineered vehicles that just run and run, so are easy to own. It also gives Suzuki an additional string to their well-respected bow of models, and will appeal to potential customers who, until now, have not been able to buy a Suzuki-badged estate.





In fact the Swace is the second model to emerge as a result of collaboration between Toyota and Suzuki, the other being Suzuki's 'Across', which I shall be road-testing very soon; please watch this space.

The car's low-slung, sleek appearance is not just for show; the Swace has been developed with a wide stance and a low centre of gravity, promising good dynamic performance, and it runs on 16 inch aluminium alloy sports wheels.



Another interesting feature is the use of a light-in-weight resin tailgate, aiding fuel consumption and emissions.

STRAIGHTFORWARD

The Swace is deliberately straightforward in its sporty styling, interior design and version structure. Indeed there is only one power train available (more of which anon), and just two variants, the SZ-T and SZ5.

The very well-equipped SZ-T provides buyers with a wealth of standard-fit useful features. I

am not going to list them all (a visit to Suzuki's U.K. website will give full details), but include, as examples, the 'Pre-Collision System' (PCS: a radar wave based system for avoiding collisions with vehicles, cyclists or people), a brake hold system (to stop the car rolling when at a standstill and about to pull away), 'Lane Tracing Assist' or LTA, 'Road Sign Assist', a rear parking assistance camera, 'Dynamic Radar' cruise control (which helps keep a safe distance from the vehicle ahead), automatic switching of the headlamps between low and high beam, heating for the steering wheel and front seats, seven airbags, dual zone air conditioning, a seven-inch LCD colour information screen, a separate eight-inch centrally-positioned touch screen, an FM/AM/DAB radio, also Apple CarPlay and Android connectivity.

The SZ5 (as tested) gives even more, including front and rear parking distance sensors, blind spot warnings, rear cross-traffic alert (warning the driver of approaching traffic, when reversing out of a parking space), 'Simple-Intelligent Park Assist' ('S-IPA') and 'Smart' door locking. It also has door lamps, cup holder lights (seriously, what a good idea!), a console box plus arm rest, a light for the front console tray, a wireless phone charger, a rear seat central arm rest and bi-projector headlamps. One surprising omission, I feel, from the list is sat-nav… although a mobile phone can be linked to the central screen display.

You may be wondering what is 'Simple-Intelligent Park Assist' ('S-IPA')? Well, using ultrasonic wave sensors, this standard-fit system on the SZ5 version gives audio and visual guidance to the driver when entering a parking space, when parallel parking, or when leaving a 'parallel' space, and also operates the steering wheel accordingly. It is said to be capable of working effectively even in narrow parking spaces.

Both Swace models provide the driver and front seat passenger with easy access to twin USB sockets and an 'AUX' terminal.

Importantly, both the SZ-T and SZ5 are equipped with the eCall system, triggered by sensors in the car and which automatically contacts the emergency services if the car is involved in a major accident. It can also be activated manually from within the car by the

driver or any passenger, by pressing a button. A great feature for peace of mind…

Both variants also feature neat built-in roof rails for easy use of a roof box or other carrier, when required.

List prices start at £27,499 for the SZ-T, rising to £29,299 for the SZ5. However, at the time of writing (late November 2021) Suzuki is offering customer savings of £3,000 on each model, so the SZ-T is priced at £24,499 and the SZ5 at £26,299.

If you are interested in buying, check Suzuki's website to see current offers.

PROPELLING THE SWACE

For many years Toyota has been developing and perfecting hybrid propulsion systems, which, in use around the world, have proved to be reliable and well-respected.

Therefore it is no surprise that hidden beneath the sleek skin of the Swace is a Toyota-derived self-charging power train; there's no range anxiety and no plugging-in to the mains electricity supply.



Just one variant is provided, incorporating a 1.8 litre four cylinder 16 valve naturally-aspirated petrol engine, developing 102 PS and 142 Nm (105 lb.ft) torque, allied to an electric motor producing 53 kW and 163 Nm (120 lb.ft) of torque. The combined total power output is 122 PS. The two units are designed to work seamlessly in harmony with each other, and in so doing minimise emissions (103 g/km) and fuel consumption (WLTP Combined figure of 64.2 miles per gallon).

Further aiding emissions and consumption is the sophisticated ‘S-Flow Control’ air conditioning system, which incorporates sensors to establish which seats in the car are occupied. This control function then delivers air conditioning output only to those seats. In

addition, cabin conditions are controlled by taking into account the set temperature, ambient temperature, interior temperature and available sunlight!

Depending on the prevailing driving conditions, the hybrid set-up employs the electric motor, the petrol engine, or both, for optimum performance, economy and emissions levels.

For quietly and efficiently covering short distances, the large capacity hybrid battery (mounted beneath the rear seats) enables the Swace to be driven in ‘electric only’ mode – ideal for local use when quietness and zero tailpipe emissions are preferred.

In normal motoring, the petrol engine and electric motor (powered by the petrol engine via a generator) together drive the vehicle, but if the state of battery charge is low, the petrol engine alone drives the car, while also recharging the battery, using the generator.

When rapid acceleration is required, the petrol engine and the electric motor work in tandem, and in this situation electricity is supplied to the electric motor from both the petrol engine (via the generator) and the battery.

During deceleration, electrical power is harvested by ‘regeneration’ and the battery is recharged.

DRIVE MODES

The driver can select the most appropriate mode (of three) controlling the petrol engine, electric motor and hybrid system, according to conditions and preference…

‘NORMAL’: As its name implies, this is set for a good compromise for normal motoring, between handling and ride comfort, and taking into account fuel consumption.

‘ECO’: This setting enables more gentle acceleration, with a more gradual throttle response, together with minimal operation of the air conditioning system. It is said to be good for stop-start city driving too.

'SPORT': Provides rapid acceleration when required.

In addition there is a separate console-mounted switch for engaging 'EV' mode when required, for running the vehicle purely on electrical power, at lower road speeds.

The maximum range for the 'electric only' mode is about nine miles until the vehicle's hybrid or 'traction' battery needs to be recharged. In practice the car's hybrid system operates to do this automatically.

RUNNING GEAR

MacPherson strut front suspension is utilised, while at the rear, the double wishbone set-up is positioned to maximise load space.

Suzuki says that the suspension geometry has been developed to optimise handling and ride comfort characteristics.

INSIDE STORY

I liked the uncluttered, smart appearance of the interior, and the spaciousness of it for all occupants. Suzuki says that the distance between front and rear seats is 928 mm (36.53 in), providing excellent rear seat leg room compared with others in its class. More about this later in my report.

There is plenty of space for small items to be carried, in a variety of storage compartments around the interior. That said, during my time with the car, on occasions a few additional larger compartments would have been useful.

Of course the luggage compartment is a vitally important aspect of any estate car… With a capacity of 596 litres (21.05 cu.ft) with all seats occupied, but extending to 1,232 litres (43.51 cu.ft) with the seats folded, the load area in the Swace provides plenty of flat-floored useful space for carrying. Suzuki figures show that the overall length of the load bay is

1,860 mm (73.23 in), its width is 1,430 mm (56.30 in) and the height, measured at the tailgate aperture, is 850 mm (33.46 in).



The rear seat backrests – divided two thirds: one third – can easily and quickly be folded/lowered to provide a long and very useful load bay, by activating a simple lever on each side of the car. The floor is not quite flat with the seat backrests folded, for necessarily there is a low ‘step’ required to accommodate the backrests, when rotated forwards onto the seat bases.

The boot’s carpeted rearmost floor board can be re-set in a lower than usual position, to accommodate taller loads, and is reversible to show a resin-covered upper face, useful when

wet or dirty items need to be carried. Brilliant.

Note: There is more about the practicalities of the boot in my ‘Driving and Using’ section…

The detachable load cover is easily retracted by a single touch. I should also mention the useful ‘net’ divider which can be unfurled vertically from the top of the rear seat (and is then attached to ‘hooks’ high up in the bodywork), to separate the upper section of the passenger compartment from the boot.



There’s also automatic illumination of the luggage compartment as the tailgate is opened, and a 12 volt DC accessory socket is provided within the boot.

LIKED ON FIRST ACQUAINTANCE

Without exception, during my time with the Swace all who came close to the vehicle admired its clean lines and low stance, also the high quality of its paint finish (‘Dark Blue Mica’, on the test car).

Once aboard, the Suzuki was also liked for its comfortable seats, smart overall finish and high quality appearance in terms of materials used and attention to detail.

The wide-opening doors provided easy access to, and exit from, the spacious interior, which was noted for its generous head and leg room for all occupants, front and rear. That said, the roof line above the front doors is low (deliberately so) and taller passengers in the front seats need to bear this in mind when getting into and out of the Swace. Available height improves markedly once inside the car!

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

I liked the facia layout, part of which takes the form of a large and very clear, centrally-located control screen for the various functions. Very sensibly for road safety and ease of access, the control switches and rotary knobs for the effective dual zone heating/ventilation/air conditioning set-up and the high quality sound system are positioned beneath, and separately from, the main screen. In other words you don’t need to search for these from within touch screen menus. Well done Suzuki.

The driver’s instrument panel is a model of clarity, for daytime running and at night. The speedometer, trip computer readouts, fuel gauge and temperature gauge are all easy to see at a glance.

DRIVING AND USING

Starting from rest, the car moves away in ‘EV’ (‘Electric Vehicle’) drive, near-silently and of course with zero emissions from the exhaust. The software aboard automatically switches

the electric drive in and out as required, and in my experience it does this seamlessly. However the driver can activate the EV button to give all-electric driving for up to about nine miles if the hybrid battery is fully charged. A green ‘EV’ lamp on the dash advises when the car is using electric power only.

The speedometer colour changes from its normal blue to red if the ‘Sport’ drive mode is engaged. In this situation the hybrid system parameters are changed to provide more powerful acceleration, and at the same time the steering response is sharpened up to provide a more ‘agile’ feel for driving on twisty roads (for example).

I drove the car for several miles in ‘Sport’ mode, and it responded very well when this setting was engaged, but most of my nearly-500 miles of motoring was undertaken with the car set to ‘ECO’ mode, or occasionally to ‘Normal’ mode.

Suzuki says that the ‘Normal’ model provides optimum balance between fuel economy and quietness, on the one hand, and dynamic performance on the other.

The ‘ECO’ drive mode is set up to give the most economical driving, including ‘moderate’ throttle responses, and controls the air conditioning/heating/cooling system so that power, fuel economy and emissions are not sapped unnecessarily. With the ‘ECO’ mode set, I found that acceleration, from rest and on the move, was perfectly adequate for all normal driving situations.

Although on paper the combined power output from the internal combustion engine and the electric motor sounds relatively modest, at 122 horsepower, in fact the car feels lively. It gains speed easily from rest and when on the move, and cruises quietly at all speeds. At an indicated 70 mph on a ‘light’ throttle position, the CVT transmission allows hushed progress with the petrol engine spinning at only just above 1,000 rpm.

The engine becomes a little more audible if pushed hard (for example when climbing steep hills), but not excessively so, and for most of my 500 miles the loudest noise came from the tyres when running on some ridged tarmac surfaces. Incidentally this is praise, rather than

a criticism…

What about the all-important luggage compartment? Is it fit for purpose? In fact in real life use I found that it is long, wide, tall and practical. It also proved easy to load and unload from bumper height.



As mentioned earlier in this report, the rear seat backs do not fold down to fit entirely flush with the rearmost section of the boot floor, but the ‘step’ up to the forward section of the floor is not very high.



The boot benefits from having a very useful open storage compartment on each side – I found them ideal for cameras, coats, etc. – and under the boot floor is an additional deep ‘spare wheel’ well that provides very useful hidden storage for a multitude of things, for example walking boots etc.



The main boot floor panel, behind the rear seats, can be set at one of two levels, very handy for carrying relatively tall objects. In addition this floor panel can be reversed/turned-over so that the normal carpet-covered face is replaced by an easily wiped clean resin surface – ideal for carrying wet dogs, muddy boots, etc.



Another aspect of the luggage compartment that I thought was excellent was the provision, on each side, of five very effective LED lamps (visible in the photograph below), which illuminated not only the boot and its contents but also the area immediately beneath and behind the car, when the tailgate was opened. This feature proved to be very useful to me when loading and unloading luggage at night.



EASY AND ENJOYABLE TO DRIVE

The supple ride quality was praised by all passengers who travelled in the car during my time with it. I suspect that the deep-walled tyres helped in this respect, but the suspension was also good at soaking up most road imperfections without transmitting shocks to the cabin.

Yet the car also cornered with ease; it is deliberately built with a low, wide stance and a low centre of gravity also applies. On sweeping main road bends and sharply twisting country lanes, it felt positive and safe, with reassuringly good handling and roadholding, plus very

effective brakes. While not a fan of electrically-activated parking brakes in general, praise where it's due and the set-up in the Swace worked well. Incorporated within the set up is a function to prevent the vehicle from rolling back on hills, as the parking brake is released and the vehicle is about to drive forwards.

I had custody of the Swace I covered many miles in the west country, often on roads covered with wet leaves and surface mud, and at all times the Suzuki behaved impeccably in terms of dynamic performance.

The car also felt stable in unusually high side winds, also experienced in Cornwall, and to me the power steering felt perfectly weighted at all road speeds.

During several drives at night, in squally weather with wind and rain making driving conditions unpredictable and, at times, concerning, the effective wipers and lights (in dipped and main beam) were very welcome.

Rearwards visibility is not a strongpoint of the Swace, but luckily the reversing camera works very well – until it eventually becomes covered in road grime, but this is soon cleaned off.

On several mornings the car was covered with condensation and/or ice, but the front and rear heated screens rapidly did their work from start-up. In addition, the twin-position heated seats, with 'high' and 'low' heat settings, were very welcome on cold mornings, as was the heated steering wheel.

ECONOMY?

During my 489 miles behind the wheel of the Swace, including long drives on main roads, up hill and down dale in the country, local trips, progressing against strong headwinds and enduring side winds, the car returned an overall average of 59.6 miles per gallon, which I thought was excellent. This was with the car switching into and out of electric drive as the software decided, and the system worked very well. This fuel consumption figure gives a

cruising range on a full tank of about 563 miles, and of course there is no need to plug in the car for mains recharging as the on-board self-charging hybrid system takes care of that aspect.

I feel sure that under less arduous driving conditions, a consumption figure in the low to mid 60s per gallon would have been achieved (the WLTP 'Combined' figure is 64.2 mpg). With fuel prices at all-time highs just now, such good figures help!



A TERRIFIC HANDBOOK

I was impressed by the comprehensive information provided in the handbook that comes with the car, and my wife also found it fascinating, and she is not a 'technical' person.

The handbook is some 528 pages long, and incorporated within these are full details of how to get the best out of the many high-tech features fitted to the vehicle. These include, for example, the ‘parking assist’ technology, although during my time with the Suzuki I didn’t get the opportunity to try this aspect.

As a person who has always been interested in looking after my own vehicles, I was delighted to find that Suzuki has included much information about ‘do-it-yourself’ maintenance. This is given in a clear and non-condescending format, and, for example, provides details of what can and cannot sensibly be accomplished when working at home, while also providing details of the tools and equipment required for the various jobs that they feel could be tackled by a keen owner. This sort of approach has long been a strongpoint of Suzuki and very welcome to this driver!

An examination of the engine bay suggests to me that regular checks and attentions should be straightforward. In addition, in view of the excellent reliability records of Toyota and Suzuki models over many years, I imagine that this joint venture (essentially using Toyota engineering beneath the car’s skin) will give similarly good trouble-free service in everyday use over many years.

At risk of lavishing praise galore on the Swace, can I find anything meaningful to carp about? Well, ‘not a lot’ is my answer. Okay, if I am honest, having lived with it for a week I feel that the car could do with having a few slightly larger storage compartments within the vehicle, especially in the front doors, for map books, etc. However, having said that, there is a single pocket built into the back of the front passenger seat, and a useful glovebox plus a small box-shaped compartment towards the rear of the centre console. The lack of a built-in sat nav system (which is found on some of the Toyota versions) was also missed.

Anything else to mention? Well this is not a criticism but a comment: Since the car has been built with the bodywork deliberately low for dynamic performance (and good looks), the inevitable result is that ground clearance is fairly low too. This did not give any cause for concern during my test of the car, but needs to be considered if you ever have to tackle, for

instance, a country lane with grass in the centre, or a rough track etc.

VERDICT

This highly effective, well-engineered estate car is smart, spacious, comfortable, lively and economical, and has a load bay that has been thought about with care – as have so many aspects of the vehicle. It's also sensibly priced (especially with the £3,000 'customer saving' currently available from Suzuki) and promises to perform reliably for many years.

Personally I like the self-charging hybrid set-up; there's no need to plug in the car to top up the hybrid battery, no range anxiety and indeed with overall fuel consumption in the region of 60 miles per gallon or better, the realistic driving range is well over 560 miles. That prospect is very appealing.

I very much enjoyed my week with this stylish and thoroughly modern estate, its everyday practicality and versatility will endear it to buyers too, I am sure.


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WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC IN BRIEF:

Suzuki Swace SZ5 Hybrid estate

Engine: Four cylinder, 16 valve 1.8 litre (1798cc), petrol, Euro 6d compliant.

Power: 102 PS @ 5,200 rpm.

Torque: Total 142 Nm (105 lb.ft) @ 3,600 rpm.

Electric motor: 53 kW, 163 Nm (120 lb.ft).

Transmission: CVT automatic; front wheel drive .

Performance:

0 – 62 mph: 11.1 seconds

Top speed: 112 mph.

Fuel consumption (‘Official’ figures):

WLTP figure: Combined, 64.2 mpg).

On test, over 489 miles, average 59.6 mpg.

Fuel tank capacity: 43 litres (9.46 Imperial gallons).

Approximate range on full tank at our actual achieved mpg: 563 miles.

CO2 Emissions, WLTP: 103 g/km.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles (but five years/60,000 miles for the hybrid drivetrain components).

Insurance Group: 20E

Dimensions: Length 4,655 mm (15.27 ft), Width 1,790 mm (5.87 ft), Height 1,460 mm (4.79 ft), Wheelbase 2,700 mm (8.86 ft), Ground clearance 135 mm (5.31 in.). Kerb weight 1,420 kg (3,131 lb), Luggage capacity 596 to 1,232 litres (21.05 to 43.51 cu.ft).