Suzuki Swift Attitude, Swift 4×4 hybrid and a Suzuki-powered RIB – First Impressions

Published: June 12, 2019

Author: Kim Henson

Online version:
https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/suzuki-swift-attitude-swift-4x4-hybrid-and-a-suzuki-powered-rib-first-impressions/



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‘A Swift Day Out’…

Suzuki’s latest Swifts, in ‘Attitude’ and SZ5 4×4 hybrid form – plus the firm’s marine engines – assessed by Kim Henson.

‘A Swift Day Out’ is how Suzuki heralded a driving day for motoring writers to sample their Swift Attitude on road, the Swift 4×4 hybrid in off-road conditions, and the company’s marine engines in a rigid inflatable boat (RIB)!

All words by Kim; all photographs by Kim and (where credited) by Maxine Ashford (with thanks).

SUZUKI IN THE UK

Before covering the cars driven and the boat experienced today (12th June 2019), it is interesting to look at how Suzuki has been performing in recent times…

At a press briefing, a group of motoring writers (myself included) were advised of the following facts and figures, relating to Suzuki's activities between April 2018 and March 2019:

During that time the firm has enjoyed its biggest ever global sales, and in the UK its second highest ever sales, at 38,500 units, also its largest market share, at 1.7 per cent.

In addition, the UK has been the No. 1 country in Europe for sales of new Suzukis.

In the marine engine market Suzuki has been the top supplier in the four stroke category.

Customer satisfaction has been rated very highly in Britain too, with the company being rated the best car brand in a customer satisfaction index (covering all types of product, not just cars) produced by the Institute of Customer Service. In fact Suzuki finished 15th out of 260 UK organisations.

In addition the firm was the highest-ranked volume car brand overall for customer service, as rated by J. D. Power.

In the fleet market, sales have been rising, with the company being given the 'Rising Star Award' in the Great British fleet Awards, with sales for the year to March 2019 being 10 per cent ahead of those for 2018, to claim a fleet market share of 1.4 per cent.

Individual models in the Suzuki line-up have been doing well too…

The new Jimny has been tremendously popular with buyers, with demand well ahead of supply since launch. The model was winner of the Urban category in the World Car Awards. (For more on this vehicle, look out on Wheels-Alive for my full road test of the Jimny, coming very soon).

The highly-acclaimed Swift Sport has notched up 1,500 sales since launch – meeting the figure hoped-for by Suzuki.

Vitara sales increased by five per cent between 2017 and 2018, and by another 17 per cent so far for 2019, despite the arrival on the market of six new direct competitors since January 2018.

The Swift is seen as the most important model in Suzuki's line-up, with nearly seven million examples having been sold worldwide since the original car's launch in 2004. It also represents the Suzuki model with the highest number of examples on UK roads – currently a total of 80,000 owners.

At the moment the Swift is outselling such cars as the Renault Clio, Mazda2 and others.

It is estimated that the special edition Swift Attitude will clock up sales amounting to around 40 per cent of total Swift sales in 2019…

SWIFT ATTITUDE



The competent and well-respected five door Suzuki Swift hatchback has proved to be popular with buyers in the UK as elsewhere, with the current range starting with the SZ3, priced at £12,499, and rising through SZ-T, SZ4 and SZ5 variants to the top line Swift Sport, at the moment available with a £1,100 ‘customer saving’ discount, bringing the price down to £17,499 (normally £18,599).

Well now there is another recent addition to the line-up, the Swift Attitude, which sits in the range between the SZ3 and the SZ-T. It’s based on the SZ-T but is powered by the 1.2 litre Dualjet engine, rather than the 1.0 litre Boosterjet motor as used in the SZ-T. It’s priced at £14,599.



Note that there's just one solid paint colour ('Fervent Red') included in this figure, whereas for one of the six metallic paint options, an additional £485 is payable, bringing the total price to £15,084.

At the moment too, on all Swifts except the Sport model, the cars are available at 0% APR and with no deposit required.



Even before driving the test car (with metallic paint finish), the current ‘all-in’ Swift Attitude figure of £15,084 seems reasonable for what is a high specification vehicle. In addition to a raft of up-to-the-minute safety systems, standard features on the Attitude include such desirable items as 16 inch polished aluminium alloy road wheels, a mesh front grille with chromed trim, front fog lamps, an upper level rear spoiler, electrically-heated/adjustable door mirrors, electrically-activated front door windows, a four speaker audio unit (Bluetooth and DAB enabled), USB and AUX connectors, automatic headlamp operation, air conditioning, rear privacy glass, brake assist function and bodywork additions that include front, rear and side carbon effect skirts.

As mentioned, under the bonnet is Suzuki’s well-proven 1.2 litre Dualjet engine, producing

90 bhp and decent quantities of low speed torque, endowing the car with willing performance across the rev range.

Driving pleasure is aided by an easy-changing five speed manual gearbox.

The Attitude benefits from the usual attributes of other models in the Swift range. These include reasonably spacious accommodation for rear seat passengers, as well as generous space those in the front of the car, and an accommodating luggage boot for the size of the vehicle (and far better than in early Swifts).

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ON THE ROAD

I sampled the Attitude on a variety of main routes and New Forest by-ways, and as with other versions of the Swift that I have driven, enjoyed its willing nature, comfortable ride and competent handling.

I was also monitoring the fuel consumption, and on a mixed run including some miles of 70 mph dual carriageway motoring, plus the twists and turns of the New Forest lanes, as well as some driving in congested urban areas, the on-board computer showed an average of 63.4 miles per gallon – extremely creditable, and in this case some 12 mpg better then the official WLTP 'Combined' figure of 51.4 mpg.

VERDICT

Another excellent Swift from Suzuki – well-equipped, sensibly-priced, enjoyable to drive and practical in real life use, as well as showing a disdain for visiting fuel stations. Oh, and did I mention that I was impressed?

WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC IN BRIEF:

Suzuki Swift Attitude

Engine: Euro 6 compliant four cylinder, 1.2 litre (1242cc), direct fuel injection petrol.

Transmission: Five speed manual gearbox.

Power: 90 PS @ 6,000 rpm.

Torque: 120 Nm (88 lb.ft) @ 4,400 rpm.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 11.9 seconds.

Top speed: 111 mph.

Fuel consumption (‘Official’ figures):

New WLTP figure: Combined, 51.4 mpg.

On test, average 63.4 mpg.

CO2 Emissions: 124 g/km (new WLTP figure).

Taxation: VED: First year, £150; After first year, £145.

Insurance Group: 25D.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles – plus 12 years perforation (corrosion) warranty.

Dimensions: Length 3,840 mm (12.60 ft); Width 1,735 mm (5.69 ft), Height 1,520 mm

(4.99 ft), Luggage capacity 265 to 579 litres (9.36 to 20.45 cu.ft).

Price ('On the Road'): £14,599 plus metallic paintwork as on test car £485, making the total price £15,084).

SWIFT 1.2 SZ5 SHVS Allgrip (4×4 hybrid)



Photo courtesy Maxine Ashford.

During my 'Swift Day Out' I was also able to test-drive the 1.2 litre Dualjet-powered Swift

SZ5 SHVS Allgrip (4×4 hybrid) variant, on a rather soggy off-road course made softer still by several days of heavy rain.

Before covering the off-road/four wheel drive aspects (and it's worth noting that it's rare to encounter a four wheel drive vehicle in the Supermini market sector), let's look at the 'hybrid' set-up as applied to the Swift…

Suzuki's approach to hybrid vehicles is epitomised by their SHVS ('Smart Hybrid Vehicle by Suzuki') system, which is deliberately smaller and lighter than conventional hybrid set-ups, and also less costly, yet makes significant contributions to reducing emissions and fuel consumption – therefore making the car cheaper to operate too.

This 'mild hybrid' system comes as standard on manual transmission SZ5 versions of the Swift.

How does it work? Notably it incorporates a belt-driven Integrated Starter Motor (ISG) which functions as an electrical power generator as well as a starter motor. The system 'helps' the petrol engine during start-off and when accelerating, and in addition generates electrical power through regenerative braking. The overall effect is to provide better fuel consumption and to minimise exhaust emissions.

Cars so equipped also have a conventional starter motor, which is used only for cold starts; at all other times the ISG starts the engine when required. An automatic idle stop arrangement is also built-in.

The system employs a compact high performance lithium-ion battery (located under the front passenger seat) to store the electrical energy produced. Under braking, both this battery and the car's normal 12 volt lead-acid battery are recharged.

By using the compact ISG for the mild hybrid system, the overall weight penalty compared with a standard vehicle is just 6.2 kg (13.67 lb).

In normal two wheel drive Swifts, the ‘mild hybrid’ system results in efficiency improvements of up to about 10 per cent.

Buyers of manual transmission versions (only) may optionally specify the ‘Allgrip’ fully automatic and permanent four wheel drive system, which provides extra grip for challenging road conditions. Costing £1,000 more than the SZ5’s asking price of £15,999 (thus a total of £16,999 for the car, or £17,484 if metallic paintwork is specified), when fitted the four wheel drive system is used in conjunction with Suzuki’s efficient 90 bhp 1.2 litre Dualjet engine (as also installed the Attitude version, and as opposed to the 1.0 litre turbocharged Boosterjet engine as fitted to two wheel drive SZ5 variants).

It is worth noting that the Allgrip system as fitted to the Swift comes into play automatically, when the system senses that drive to all wheels is needed. There are no buttons to push nor levers to move to engage/disengage the four wheel drive system, which is intended to improve grip in slippery conditions. However the vehicle is not intended to be a serious off-roader in the same way as the Jimny, for example (with its high ground clearance and its transfer gearbox incorporating low and high ratio selectable four wheel drive).

The ‘Tech. Spec.’ facts and figures for the Allgrip-equipped Swift model are very similar to those quoted for the Attitude, except of course for the four wheel drive and hybrid systems…

The following figures differ, compared with the two wheel drive 1.2 litre Attitude version:

Top speed: 105 mph (Attitude, 111 mph).

0–62 mph: 12.6 seconds (11.9 seconds).

Official WLTP Combined fuel consumption figure, 49.7 mpg (Attitude, 51.3 mpg).

Insurance Group: 27D (Attitude, 25D).

OFF-ROAD



Photo courtesy Maxine Ashford.

Now it is acknowledged that most owners would not venture into serious off-road territory in a four wheel drive Swift. However for the purposes of demonstrating the model's prowess in this role, Suzuki entrusted a small fleet of their Allgrip-equipped hybrid Swifts to a group of motoring writers (including me), to drive the cars on a long and challenging off-road forest route (on private land).

The route included gravel, large deep puddles and mud (made worse by heavy rain), slippery undergrowth and steep slopes both up and down, with some tight turns thrown in.

The cars – with standard/normal ground clearance – all acquitted themselves perfectly well, with the Allgrip system constantly adjusting and automatically feeding grip to the wheels with the least grip at any time. The system operated seamlessly throughout this tough test.

Key to operation of the straightforward set-up is a viscous coupling unit which acts as a centre differential between the front and rear drive axles. It incorporates a total of 32 annular plates (in two sets) that operate within a silicon fluid. When needed, this transfers torque to the rear wheels as well as the front wheels (in normal conditions the car runs as a front wheel drive vehicle).

Essentially… As the plates rotate faster than usual in a 'wheelspin' situation, friction-induced heat and shear is created and the silicon fluid becomes more viscous, thus effectively locking the plates together and feeding drive to the rear wheels (in this way up to 50 per cent of available torque can be delivered to the rear wheels, when needed).

Suzuki says that the simple four wheel drive system adds only about 50 kg (around 110 lb) to the weight of the car, compared with two wheel drive versions, and, due to the Allgrip system being used in combination with the hybrid technology already described, the efficiency loss compared with normal two wheel drive versions is less than 10 per cent.



ALL AT SEA?



Last but not least on this ‘Swift Day Out’, the attending motoring writers were treated to an exhilarating ride aboard a rigid inflatable boat (RIB) along and across the Solent, between Lymington in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Three such craft were employed on each trip, and each was powered by a formidable outboard V6 four stroke petrol engine made by Suzuki.

These engines are available with a range of power outputs from 200 to 350 bhp, and can be fitted to craft singly or in pairs, to provide considerable performance (including, for example, the ability to cruise easily at around 40 knots).

As an example, the range-topper is the DF350A, being a narrow angle (so compact) V6 motor with a displacement of 4679cc and developing 350 bhp. It includes Suzuki's innovative Contra-Rotating Dual Propeller which provides greater 'grip' under water and therefore a higher level of propulsion than hitherto, as well as giving a more even distribution of torque.

The boat in which I travelled was fitted with the 300 bhp version – an impressively powerful yet quiet-running machine.



The boats used for this trip are operated by Commercial RIB Charter (CRC) and sister company Solent RIB Charter, based in Lymington. They have exclusively used Suzuki outboard motors for the last eight years, for their fleet of 25 vessels.

RESPECT…

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A novel and unusual touch for this car manufacturer's press event was that in the middle of the Solent, while travelling on the Suzuki-powered RIBs, a small landing craft type vessel appeared. This too was Suzuki-powered (in this case by two 200 bhp motors), and on board was a Suzuki Swift; this is the first time I have attended an event when a car was actually 'launched' at sea! For some time all four vessels motored at speed in convoy towards the Isle of Wight…



A Swift Day Out? Certainly – it involved a packed schedule – but for me, and for the other

writers attending, it was a hugely enjoyable and useful day too.

