Suzuki Vitara new S Road Test

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Keith Ward road-tests Suzuki’s flagship Vitara

LATEST to emerge from an ongoing radical revision of high-flying Suzuki’s whole model range is a tech-laden, flagship “S” version of their impressive high-stance Vitara chunky SUV.

At £20,899 it zooms straight in as top dog, £900 above the Vitara SZ5, next down the trim scale, to complete the handsome new Vitara range launched last year.

Both come with radar brake support and adaptive cruise control to automatically stop you shunting the vehicle in front. The S is expected to account for 15 per cent of Vitara sales.

Unique to it are smart gloss black 17-inch alloys, a fetching vertical grille design, LEDV

headlamps with red projector covers, black side body mouldings, a rear upper spoiler, satin silver door mirrors, suede seats and snazzy red interior stitching to lift an otherwise fairly dull cabin.



Standard kit also includes Suzuki's so-called ALLGRIP intelligent four-wheel-drive, wheel arch extensions, digital air con, a rear parking camera and navigation, whose screen is restricted by bands of complex touch-controls.

In size the Vitara sits between the smaller Nissan Juke and the larger Kia Sportage, with reasonable passenger and luggage space. There's shoulder and head room for three average-sized passengers in the rear. The back seats fold easily into a flat extension of the boot, which itself has two levels to bring it up flush with the rear sill for easier loading.



The Vitara S sports an all-new 140 PS turbo 1.4-litre petrol engine as the first application of so-called “BOOSTERJET” technology from the Japanese company (the cars are actually built in Hungary, alongside Swift and S-Cross models).

At a hefty 220 Nm or 162 lb ft this unit offers 41 per cent more torque than its bigger 1.6-litre petrol stablemate, peaking from just 1,500 rpm – unusually low for a turbocharged engine.

On the road, making for a flexible response through an easy six-speed manual gearbox, it also boasts 17 per cent more power and four per cent better fuel economy at an official combined 52.3 mpg, although in practice we recorded just 41.6 in a week’s motoring, consistent with previous runs in this model.

Performance is nimble rather than rapid. There is some body lean on quick corners but roadholding is impressive throughout, especially with Suzuki's 4WD ALLGRIP in the "Sport" setting of its four modes, which sharpens the car's responses in general. We had separately admired these qualities on a racetrack slalom course.

The other three settings, dialled up from a circular selector between the front seats, are auto (for open road cruising in 2WD) plus snow and a locking diff to get you out of especially sticky situations. Don't expect the Vitara to transform into an all-terrain Land Rover, but there are Suzuki faithful among Pennine dwellers I know who value the brand's winter-beating virtues.

VERDICT

The S is a welcome and likeable addition to the breed.

WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF:

Model: Suzuki Vitara 1.4 S.

Type: SUV; five-door, five seats.

Dimensions: Length 4,175 mm (13.70 ft); width 1,775 mm (5.82 ft); height 1,610 mm (5.28 ft); kerb wt 1,210 kg (2,668 lb).

Boot: Length 760 to 1,310 mm (2.49 to 4.30 ft); width 1,020 mm (3.35 ft); Vol 375 to 1,160 litres (13.24 to 40.97 cu.ft).

Engine: Petrol; 1.4 BOOSTERJET turbo.

Transmission: ALLGRIP 4WD; 6-speed manual gearbox.

Power: 140 PS @ 5,500 rpm.

Max torque: 220 Nm (162 lb.ft) @ 1,500–4,000 rpm.

Pace: 0-62 in 10.2 seconds; Top speed 124 mph.

MPG: On test 41.6; official combined 52.3; tank 47 litres.

Emissions and taxation: 127 g/km; VED Band D; Nil then £110 per year.

Insurance: Group 16.

Tyres: 215/55; R17

Price: £20,899.

Rivals: Nissan Juke; Skoda Yeti; Peugeot 2008; Vauxhall Mokka.