



Suzuki's 55 Years of ALLGRIP 4x4 Technology celebrated

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(Four wheel drive) 'Love on a mountain top'...

Kim Henson reports on a landmark event staged by Suzuki to highlight 55 years of their clever and effective 'ALLGRIP' four wheel drive systems.

(All words © Kim Henson; all photographs © Kim Henson, except eVitara image, from Suzuki).

At a recent test drive session held in south Wales and centred on the 'Monster Mountain' off-road facility near Merthyr Tydfil, motoring writers were invited by Suzuki to test-drive a selection of their models, both current and 'heritage', featuring their four wheel drive systems developed over 55 years and current versions of which are known by the 'ALLGRIP' name.

To start the day, current model 4x4 Suzukis were driven by attendees on a varied road route between Cardiff and Monster Mountain, where a wide range of all wheel drive models from the company were then available for driving. This tough testing took place in a harsh environment over punishing terrain which included dust galore, boulders, sharp stones, steep angles and water-filled sections of muddy track. Personally I feel that it was brave of Suzuki - yet equally showing faith in their products past and present - to subject their immaculate heritage models from decades past to the same treatment as their current 4x4 vehicles!



While this feature necessarily concentrates on this driving event, in due course, in a separate feature, I shall be writing on Wheels-Alive in more detail about the evolution of Suzuki's 4x4 systems over the years. Please watch this space. Meanwhile it is worth considering that Suzuki's sophisticated four wheel drive systems used today started with the LJ10 model in 1970 - Suzuki's first four wheel drive lightweight vehicle, with innovative development ever since.

Suzuki Today

Before covering the various test drives that I undertook on that day, it is worth putting in perspective Suzuki's situation in the market today, and how the 4x4 technology fits into the 'big picture'.



At a press presentation in Cardiff, motoring writers were advised that global production of Suzukis during 2024 amounted to some 3.3 million cars.

Suzukis are predominantly sold in Japan, Europe and India, where the company holds a remarkable 49 per cent market share. Suzukis are not sold in China nor in the U.S.A. – an advantage to the company amidst tariff uncertainties...

I found it interesting that the Suzuki plan for global sales aimed for 3.16 million cars in 2023, whereas for 2025 the projection has increased to 4.2 million. Concurrently, global operating profit projections have risen from £2.03 billion in 2023 to £3.58 billion for 2025.

Writers were told that Suzuki is very definitely committed to the UK and Europe.

It is interesting too that in Europe the company sells more cars than Honda and Mazda.

The latest Swift, introduced in 2024, is doing well in the UK, meeting Suzuki's predicted sales figure of 2,000 units per year.

It is significant that British customers are very happy with their Suzuki car purchases, with 96.1 per cent of those buying a new example giving a rating of 9 or 10 out of 10, when asked.

A recent Car Dealer Power Survey rated Suzuki fourth out of 23 car brands sold in Britain.

The company's recently-introduced 'Service-activated' Warranty is a game-changer, providing up to 10 years or 100,000 miles of cover for buyers, who can gain an additional year's warranty (above the standard three years cover) by having their Suzuki serviced at a dealer. In effect, one service equates to one extra year of warranty, giving peace of mind.

The inherent and proven reliability of Suzukis generally is another factor in the company's favour.



(Incidentally, Suzuki motorcycles sold in Britain come with a seven year/70,000 mile warranty).

Why four wheel drive?

Suzuki's current ALLGRIP four wheel drive systems (and there are three, vehicle-dependent types) have been diligently developed over the decades to provide peace of mind and ease of mobility in all conditions, while minimising the fuel consumption and emissions penalties sometimes associated with four wheel drive set-ups. Suzuki's highly respected lightweight platform designs help in this respect.

ALLGRIP provides enhanced grip in all situations, and is especially useful for customers living in country areas, where slippery surfaces, especially in winter, and sometimes challenging terrain can make driving difficult. At the same time, Suzuki has ensured that their ALLGRIP-equipped vehicles remain as nimble and easy to drive on the road as the normal front wheel drive versions of their models.

The fact that four wheel drive is an option on every model in Suzuki's current line-up enables the company to stand out from rival manufacturers, and - crucially - also helps it cater for its customers' needs.

At the 'ALLGRIP 55 Years' event, motoring scribes were advised that across all makes and models sold in the UK, just five per cent of small hatchbacks and compact SUVs are equipped with four wheel drive, notably since, when it comes to relatively small vehicles, this is offered only in a few instances. (By contrast across all new models in the market, sales of 4WD vehicles - mainly on larger models - currently amount to 17 per cent).

However, where four wheel drive *is* offered to buyers in the compact SUV sector (for example), some 14 per cent of buyers make this choice.

This is seen as giving Suzuki a significant advantage since customers considering any of the company's models - including their compact vehicles - can opt for all wheel drive and its



benefits.

These are the ALLGRIP systems available today:

ALLGRIP Auto

Since 2013 the Swift has been offered with the ALLGRIP Auto four wheel drive system. This is a simple, permanent fully automatic set-up, incorporating a viscous coupling that effectively acts as a centre differential, linking the front and rear axles. It features two sets of annular plates that rotate in a silicon type fluid. If the front wheels start to spin, the fluid heats up through friction caused by rotational differences in the plates and becomes more viscous, thus locking the coupling and feeding more drive to the rear wheels.

(Note: The popular Ignis, now discontinued, was also offered with the ALLGRIP Auto 4×4 system).

ALLGRIP Select



Optionally fitted to the Vitara and S-Cross in both manual and automatic versions, this electronically-activated system is driver-operated by a rotary 'push and turn' control with 'Auto', 'Sport', 'Snow' and 'Lock' settings.

It uses integrated control of the engine, transmission, anti-lock brake system to provide optimal drive for any situation.

In brief...

The 'Auto' mode prioritises fuel economy, using 2WD by default and automatically switching to 4WD if wheel spin occurs.



The 'Sport' setting uses accelerator inputs to optimise engine response and cornering performance. When Sport is selected, the engine speed increases by 500 rpm and 20 per cent more torque is automatically directed to the rear wheels.

The 'Snow' mode automatically uses four wheel drive to enable progress in slippery surface conditions.

The 'Lock' setting, which continually sends high torque to the rear wheels, is for extricating the car from snow, sand or mud.

Suzuki Across 'E-Four'

The Across plug-in hybrid (PHEV) SUV (Suzuki's version of the Toyota RAV4, built by Toyota) is notable for its sophisticated hybrid system that enables all-electric operation for up to 46 miles, and for its built-in four wheel drive set-up.

In brief, the E-Four 4WD system employs an independent 40kW rear-mounted electric motor that works in conjunction with the front motor to provide torque variation ranging from 100:0 to 20:80.

It enhances stability and grip on slippery surfaces and enhances handling on a variety of road surfaces.

The system incorporates the clever 'AWD Integrated Management' (AIM), which controls drive force distribution, throttle control, transmission change scheduling, electric power steering assistance and braking.

The 'Trail Mode' is an automatic limited slip differential, applying grip to wheels that start to spin and redirecting it to those still gripping. It also adjusts the throttle and transmission shift pattern to keep the vehicle moving.

Note: The Jimny (now discontinued in the UK) was equipped with 'ALLGRIP Pro' - a part



time four wheel drive set-up controlled manually, with a low range transfer gear, and with the system easily switchable between 2H (2WD high gear), 4H (4WD high gear), and 4L (4WD low gear).

Comparative UK sales figures - ALLGRIP Suzukis

Currently, seven per cent of Swifts are customer-specified with ALLGRIP 4WD.

By contrast, 26 per cent of Vitaras and S-Cross models are sold with the ALLGRIP Select option.

All Across models have built-in four wheel drive.

THE FUTURE COMING SOON: eVitara





eVitara – Photograph from Suzuki.

Suzuki's first all-electric car is the eVitara, with customer deliveries arriving in Britain at the end of October 2025.

Notable points include: Suzuki's newly-developed HEARTECH-e platform (designed specifically for BEVs), On-The-Road prices starting at £29,999, a driving range of up to 264 miles, a free home charge point from Ohme, plus 10,000 miles worth of electricity, and up to 10 years warranty (including the battery).

'ALLGRIP-e' four wheel drive versions will be offered, with a 128kW front motor plus a 48kW rear motor. A Trail mode is incorporated, with a Limited Slip Differential enabling escape from rough terrain by applying the brakes to spinning wheels.

It is said that the four wheel drive, twin motor version of the eVitara will be significantly faster than the standard two wheel drive model.

Suzuki tells us that there are only three compact EV SUVs in this sector of the UK market that are available with a four wheel drive option.

When the going gets tough... Driving ALLGRIP versions of Suzuki's present and past

Vitara 1.4 Ultra

My first drive of the day was in a current model Vitara 1.4 Ultra ALLGRIP (pictured below, in Cardiff), powered by the proven Boosterjet engine and my test vehicle, with twin tone paintwork option, was priced at £31,634.



For the record, the 129 PS motor delivers an official Combined fuel consumption figure of 52.3 miles per gallon, a top speed of 121 mph and acceleration from standstill to 62 mph in 10.2 seconds.

The test car had seen hard off-road treatment the previous day, but driving it on a mixture of roads between Cardiff and the 'Monster Mountain' test facility near Merthyr Tydfil, you would never have known it. The car performed smoothly, quietly and in lively fashion, with fuel consumption on my drive of around 50 mpg.

I have long been a fan of the Vitara, and all the positives I have noted previously (notably in



road tests on this website; please enter 'Vitara' in the search box, to see my write-ups) were reconfirmed. The car is comfortable in terms of its seats and suspension, is stable on twisty roads and fun to drive. During my test drive the paved roads were dry and the 4WD selector was in 'Auto' (2WD) mode.

I drove a different example of the same model on the seriously rough and nasty to drive-on off-road tracks at Monster Mountain, and have had previous off-road experience in Vitaras. Therefore I was unsurprised at the sheer competence of the car (driven with the 4WD selector set to normal 'Auto' mode), on corrugated rough surface sections, over rocky areas, in mud, through water, along the sides of steeply sloping banks and up and down steep gradients. (Note: On a previous occasion I was simply amazed at how easily a standard Vitara, on normal 'road' tyres, could climb a ridiculously steep gradient with a slippery surface).

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While the suspension was being hammered and the underbody showered with flying rocks, the car remained steadfast in terms of progress, smooth-running and docile. It remained pleasant to drive on normal roads after being driven hard by many different drivers.

VERDICT: A tough, effective, practical, likeable and economical car. My admiration for the model has just gone up a notch further!

Back in time:

2013 Second Generation Grand Vitara 2.4 petrol



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My next outing 'off-road' was in a second generation Grand Vitara; the model had been introduced in 2005 with a range of five petrol engines plus a diesel unit.

My test car, one of Suzuki's 'heritage' models, dated from 2013 and beneath its muddy exterior was in excellent condition. It was powered by a 2.4 litre petrol engine.

Notable features of this model include a ladder-frame platform, welded to a deformation-resisting monocoque body, with all major components made of ultra-high tensile steel.

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The ALLGRIP 4×4 system in this Grand Vitara is operated by driver-selection of one of four modes:

4H provides smooth, stable four wheel drive.

4H Lock provides additional traction for rougher roads.

4L Lock mode is there for tackling extreme surface states.

N enables the Grand Vitara to be towed.

During my test drive the car was in the 4H drive mode throughout.

As an enthusiast of older vehicles, I winced at the sounds of rocks bombarding the underbody, and flinched as it negotiated 'washboard' type surfaces, ploughed through deep mud and water and was guided through a series of deep gulleys, high peaks and generally inhospitable terrain.

However... the Suzuki just laughed it all off and appeared to be enjoying the experience. The engine and transmission remained smooth, traction was excellent and there was not a squeak nor rattle in evidence.



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VERDICT: The Grand Vitara's off-road performance would have been excellent for a new vehicle, let alone a 12 year old car. Just brilliant.

2005 Grand Vitara 2.5 V6 petrol



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My next off-road adventure was in a five door Grand Vitara dating from May 2005. In fact this is one of the second generation of Vitara models, which saw the arrival, in 1998, of the first Grand Vitara.

The test car was powered by Suzuki's 'smooth-as-silk' 2.5 litre V6 petrol engine. I found this vehicle to be very comfortably furnished, and spacious within.

Again I felt very guilty as the car was pounding along, and at speed, over surfaces that would be better avoided in any normal use!



The V6 motor and effective drivetrain propelled the Grand Vitara effortlessly over this car-breaking wild countryside. The suspension easily coped with the major ups and downs encountered, and despite all the noise of the constant bombardment of rocks being thrown up by the tyres and hitting the underbody, the Suzuki just motored on without any complaint.

Just one of the aspects that impressed me was the was that the car, with its powerful V6 motor, could easily be brought into line if deliberately driven enthusiastically around tight turns on loose surfaces (NOT to be recommended in normal use, of course).





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VERDICT: It is hard to believe that this is a 20 year old vehicle, being driven hard over awful tracks, yet it wasn't bothered in the slightest. Respect indeed for this 'mature' Grand Vitara.

2004 Second Generation Grand Vitara 1.6 petrol



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Even older, at 21 years, was the September 2004 Grand Vitara that I next put through its paces on the loosely surfaced mountain tracks. In this case the test car was powered by a 1.6 litre engine, and once again the Suzuki tackled with ease each obstacle presented to it, with the transmission set to '4H' mode.



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Would it climb a slippery slope or two? Of course it did. Would it be easy to steer around the rough circuitous tracks that incorporated humps and dips on some of the bends? Oh yes, no problem. Was there anything that would upset this tough machine? No, not that I could find.



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VERDICT: Competence personified, and once again testament to the build quality of Suzukis through the decades.

OVERALL:



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My time in south Wales with Suzuki was enjoyable, but more importantly reinforced my image of the company's 4×4 products - including older models - as being well-engineered, solidly-built, easy to drive and fun.

On a personal level, I should add that in addition to 2WD cars, I have been test-driving 4×4 vehicles, of all makes and models, for more than four decades, and it was in the early 1980s that I first test drove Suzukis with all wheel drive. I was impressed then too...

Please check out Suzuki UK's website for more information about their vehicles:
<https://cars.suzuki.co.uk>