Suzuki’s ‘Way of Life’ and what this innovative, successful company is doing today, plus First Impressions of some of the firm’s latest models…

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Kim Henson finds out about Suzuki's progress, and drives some of its current vehicles...

(Note from Kim: You may also be interested in finding out what Wheels-Alive contributor David Miles has written about Suzuki in general and the new Swift 4×4 in particular. David is well known and respected for his insightful analysis of the motoring industry and the models produced by it; please click HERE to read his report).

Recently I was able to catch up in terms of Suzuki's position in the automotive world, and had the opportunity to drive a selection of the company's most recent vehicles.

It may come as a surprise to learn that Suzuki was established as far back as 1909, originally as makers of looms for the silk weaving industry.

The firm started building motorcycles in the early 1950s, and their first small car, the front wheel drive 'Suzulight', arrived in 1955, powered by a two stroke 360cc engine.

This vehicle established the firm's credentials as producers of innovative and highly effective small cars, although it was not until 1979 that the highly successful Alto hatchback was introduced and really put Suzuki on the map in the UK. By that time the company had already gained respect for producing small, but tough and highly competent, four wheel drive models, starting with the LJ10 ('Light Jeep 10') in 1970.

Since then the company has gone from strength to strength, and its reputation for building fascinating, innovative, effective and fuel-efficient compact vehicles has deservedly grown with it.

Suzuki Today

At a recent Suzuki press event I discovered that the company, which produced three million vehicles last year, is currently ranked as the ninth largest motor manufacturer in the world, and the third biggest in Japan, with a 15 per cent market share.

It is also a very major player in India, where, under the name of Maruti Suzuki India, it has been the biggest-selling car maker for the last 28 years, and where it takes a 48 per cent market share. Sales there in 2015 included 150,000 Celerios and 50,000 Balenos (a larger model).

Baleno – coming very soon…

The new Baleno is soon to become available for British buyers. This attractive newcomer is the most aerodynamic Suzuki ever produced, with a drag coefficient (CD) of just 0.299.



The car is the second model from the company (after the recently-introduced Vitara) to benefit from Boosterjet engine technology. The three cylinder, direct injection turbocharged 1.0 litre motor in the Baleno produces an impressive 111 bhp. Alternatively, the Baleno will be offered with a ‘Smart Hybrid Vehicle from Suzuki’ (or ‘SHVS’) 1.2 litre ‘Mild Hybrid’ Dualjet power unit. This employs a new and innovative ‘Integrated Starter Generator’ (‘ISG’) system to supplement engine power during acceleration, in addition to generating electrical power through regenerative braking.

I was able to inspect (but not yet drive) a pre-production example, with which I was very

impressed.

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The car offers more interior and boot space than the Swift, but is still small enough to drive easily in town, and to park. It will be interesting to give our first driving impressions on this model, in due course.

Celerio

Currently the externally compact but internally spacious Celerio (which came on stream in Britain in 2015) is doing very well in the UK, which is the best market in Europe for the model, and to date the company has sold over 1,000 more Celerios than originally envisaged here.

Overall performance

Suzuki sales in Britain have continued to increase since the start of this year (following a slight dip in 2015 as older models were phased out and new ones arrived). The firm anticipates that the 2016 figures will amount to around 40,000 vehicles, with the Celerio, Swift and Vitara models each contributing over 10,000 units to this figure.

It seems certain that the company's profile will soon be raised higher still, with the imminent arrival (a little later this year) of the new Baleno, making extensive use of high tech solutions (especially within the power unit/drivetrain, as mentioned above), and with a new 'A' segment car plus an SUV due to appear before too long. Further good news is expected in the form of new S-Cross and Swift models.

The company is also delighted that their press office has been voted 'Number 1' in the UK, and that Suzuki is rated (in the National Dealers Franchise Survey) as the third most highly valued vehicle franchise here.

I am also aware of the enviable reputation that Suzukis have justifiably earned in the motor trade, for reliability and cost-effective operation in the long term.

Suzuki Driving…

I was able to briefly sample four different examples of current Suzukis:

Vitara 1.6 DDiS SZ5 (two wheel drive) SZ5



My first outing of the day was in a front wheel drive, 1.6 litre diesel-powered version of the Hungarian-built Vitara, in very well-equipped SZ5 form, and during an hour-long test drive I

was once again highly impressed by the model. As with all current line-up Vitaras that I have tried so far, the test car proved to be smooth and quiet-running in mechanical terms, and the ride comfort was commendable, even on poorly-surfaced by-ways.



Head and leg room is generous for both front and rear seat passengers, and I liked the high quality appearance and feel of the interior. There's plenty of luggage space too (even with the rear seats occupied), within a sensibly-shaped and well-proportioned load compartment.

The test car's 1.6 litre, twin overhead camshaft, 16 valve four cylinder diesel engine is Euro 6 compliant, and benefits from the incorporation of an electronically-controlled Variable

Geometry Turbocharger (VGT), designed to improve power, torque and emissions. This motor is mated to a slick-changing six speed manual transmission, which I appreciated on the twisting, hilly parts of my test drive in the south Cotswolds, in which use the vehicle felt sure-footed and was enjoyable to drive.

There's plenty of power available (up to 120 PS, at 3,750 rpm), and, importantly, the maximum torque output of 320 Nm (236 lb.ft) is delivered at just 1,750 rpm – meaning that the engine pulls strongly from relatively low road speeds, reducing the necessity for constant gear-changing in heavy traffic and on routes sprinkled with gradients.

At high road speeds the car is hushed, and an indicated 60 mph required just 1,500 rpm or so.

This version of the Vitara promises to be fuel-efficient too, with an official quoted 'Combined' consumption figure of 70.6 mpg. In real-world motoring, I would expect that most users should see well over 60 mpg in mixed motoring.

Personally I was very pleased to find that a conventional, manually-operated handbrake lever (rather than an electrically-controlled brake) has been retained for the new Vitaras; others I spoke to agreed with me on this.

VERDICT: Likeable, comfortable, practical, economical, competent.

WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC IN BRIEF:

Suzuki Vitara 1.6 DDiS SZ5 (two wheel drive).

Engine: In-line four cylinder, 1598cc, turbo diesel (with Variable Geometry Turbocharger).

Transmission: Six speed manual gearbox; front wheel drive.

Power: 120 PS @ 3,750 rpm.

Torque: 320 Nm (236 lb.ft) @ 1,750 rpm.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 11.5 seconds.

Top speed: 112 mph.

Fuel consumption (‘Official’ figures): Urban, 61.4 mpg; Combined, 70.6 mpg.

Price (‘On the Road’): £19,999 (with options, as test-driven, £20,799).

Vitara 1.4 BOOSTERJET S



From one Vitara to another, and this was the first opportunity that I myself had to try the new 1.4 litre petrol-powered Vitara with Suzuki's Boosterjet technology and the firm's well-respected ALLGRIP four wheel drive system.

An innovative approach sees the adoption of a short port inlet manifold, and the incorporation of the exhaust manifold within the cylinder head, in addition to which the turbocharger is bolted directly to the cylinder head. The combined effect of this design is that there is less complexity, lower weight, reduced turbo lag and improved access within the engine bay (aiding maintenance throughout the life of the vehicle).



The compact 16 valve, four cylinder engine has a capacity of just 1373cc, but delivers a big-hearted 140 PS at 5,500 rpm, plus 220 Nm (162 lb.ft) of torque through a wide rev band from 1,500 to 4,000 rpm.

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The spacious practicality offered throughout the Vitara line-up comes as standard in this version too, and, in range-topping ‘S’ form the test car was comprehensively furnished and equipped with a host of useful features.

On the road this car was a revelation. Acceleration from a standstill was rapid (the official figure shows from zero to rest takes 10.2 seconds), and even more rewarding when on the move was the ‘instant’ pick-up available; no turbo lag was evident and overtaking manoeuvres were easily, quickly and safely accomplished.

The six speed manual gearbox on the test car was delightfully smooth to use when required. However, this gem of an engine, providing such a broad spread of high torque output from low to fairly high rpm, helped reduce the number of gearchanges required in the normal motoring of my test drive.

This Vitara handled well too, providing a sporty feel and good grip, while providing a comfortable ride quality, appreciated by my passenger as well as me.

The official fuel consumption figures indicate that this version will not be quite as economical as the diesel Vitara I tried first, but still pretty good, with an Urban figure of 44.8 mpg and a Combined rating of 52.3 mpg. I would expect to typically see around 40 to 45 mpg in a variety of real-world motoring situations.

VERDICT: Competence personified – not least because of the excellent BOOSTERJET engine. Highly enjoyable to drive, excellent driveability, as practical and comfortable as the other models in the current Vitara line-up.



WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC IN BRIEF:

Suzuki Vitara 1.4 BOOSTERJET S (with ALLGRIP four wheel drive system)

Engine: In-line 16 valve, four cylinder, 1373cc, turbocharged petrol.

Transmission: Six speed manual gearbox; all wheel drive.

Power: 140 PS @ 5,500 rpm.

Torque: 220 Nm (162 lb.ft) @ 1,500 to 4,000 rpm.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 10.2 seconds.

Top speed: 124 mph.

Fuel consumption (‘Official’ figures): Urban, 44.8 mpg; Combined, 52.3 mpg.

Price (‘On the Road’): Manual gearbox version, £20,899 (with options, as test-driven, £21,329).

Celerio 1.0 SZ3 Dualjet



I was surprised to discover that, since its introduction in Britain early in 2015, many buyers of the externally compact but internally spacious, Celerio city car (built in Rayong, Thailand) are opting for versions powered by the proven K10B 1.0 litre engine (already proven in the Alto and Splash). Now, don't get me wrong, that is a VERY good and economical engine, BUT even better, and available with SZ3 trim level (only) for just a relatively small price premium (of around £500) is the K10C Dualjet powered version.

The Dualjet engine incorporates a variety of technical enhancements, notably providing greatly improved fuel consumption and emissions performance.



By comparison with the K10B motor, the compression ratio in the K10C engine is higher (at 12.0:1 instead of 11.0:1), and combustion efficiency is better, through the use of bowl-shaped piston crowns to produce greater air turbulence within the cylinders, in conjunction with a dual injection system, known as ‘Dualjet’. With this system the petrol injectors are positioned VERY close to the inlet valves (the inlet ports and combustion chambers are correspondingly revised too), to provide finer fuel mixture atomisation and thus improving transfer into the cylinders.

In addition, the Dualjet engines feature a cooled ‘Exhaust Gas Recirculation’ (‘EGR’) set-up, together with piston cooling jets. Found too on Dualjet-powered Celerios is Suzuki’s ‘Engine

Auto Stop Start' system, which stops the engine when the car is halted (in traffic, etc.).

The Celerio is also equipped with a much improved five speed gearbox, compared with earlier designs, notably incorporating lower friction bearings and reducing torque loss by 40 per cent (thereby improving efficiency).

I closely studied the Dualjet engine, and then marvelled at the generous head, leg and luggage space for a car having such compact external dimensions. By the way, it's a full five seater, by contrast with many small cars of today. The boot provides class-leading luggage space too, at 254 litres (approximately 9 cu.ft).

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It was time to take to the wheel, and on a varied road route taking in town and country sections, I enjoyed driving this most efficient form of the Celerio.

While it is no sports car (it is, of course, primarily intended to be a practical and economical urban machine), its performance is more than adequate, and the three cylinder engine is very willing. Yes, the motor's unique sound tells you that it has just three cylinders, but I didn't find the engine note noisy or intrusive, even when accelerating hard. The five speed manual gearbox on the test car was easy to operate too.

On the open road the car performed eagerly, and cruised smoothly and happily at 60 mph and higher speeds, where limits allowed.

Suzuki figures advise that the car can scoot from rest to 62 mph in 13 seconds, and has a top speed of 96 mph (so there is plenty in reserve at the UK's motorway limit of 70 mph).

The official fuel consumption figures read 68.9 mpg for 'Urban' use, with the Combined rating being 83 mpg. I know from previous experience with this model that real-life consumption figures approaching 75 mpg are achievable without trying too hard (incidentally, this compares with an official Combined figure of 65.7 mpg for the non-Dualjet

K10B versions).

With a CO2 emissions rating of just 84 g/km, the Dualjet models beat the non-Dualjet versions by quite a margin, although these still qualify for zero rate road tax, at 99 g/km.

VERDICT: A perky, well-designed and brilliantly executed, highly practical full five seater city car, with much more room than you might expect for a compact vehicle, and with innovative mechanical solutions that result in lively performance, low emissions and fuel consumption to make a petrol retailer sigh.



WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC IN BRIEF:

Suzuki Celerio 1.0 SZ3 Dualjet

Engine: In-line 12 valve, three cylinder, 998cc petrol.

Transmission: Five speed manual gearbox; front wheel drive.

Power: 68 PS @ 6,000 rpm.

Torque: 93 Nm (68 lb.ft) @ 3,500 rpm.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 13.0 seconds.

Top speed: 96 mph.

Fuel consumption (‘Official’ figures): Urban, 68.9 mpg; Combined, 83.0 mpg.

Price (‘On the Road’): Manual gearbox version, £8,499 (with options, as test-driven, £8,914).

Swift 4×4



An interesting new Suzuki is the latest, four wheel drive version of the Swift, powered by a 1.2 litre (1242cc) four cylinder petrol engine incorporating Dualjet technology (with benefits as just described by me, above, for the Dualjet-equipped Celerio).

To avoid duplication of technical and general information on this model, I won't cover this here 'chapter and verse', as my colleague David Miles has also driven this version and, as indicated at the start of this feature, has written a comprehensive review for Wheels-Alive. To read this and to find out what David thinks of this Suzuki, please click HERE.

However, having first driven this model myself, I have since then read his report and I will say that I agree with David in his conclusions about the Swift 4×4.

Personally I found this model to be smooth-running, quiet, and fun to drive (if not overtly fast), provided that maximum use is made of the gearbox. It's especially entertaining in a positive way on winding roads where its handling, balance and superior grip shone through. Another remarkably good Suzuki…

