Very Brief Impressions – Cars driven at the Guild of Motoring Writers' 'Big Day Out', 2019

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Kim Henson samples a few of the latest models…

On the occasion of the Guild of Motoring Writers' 'Big Day Out' event, held recently at Castle Combe in Wiltshire, I was able to briefly test drive some of the latest offerings from different manufacturers…

(All words and photos by Kim).

Suzuki Vitara 1.4 (latest, 2019 version)

The previous generation Vitaras (which arrived in 2015) were well thought of by press and public alike. However, to keep the model attractive to buyers in a competitive SUV market place, the 2019 versions have been significantly upgraded in terms of new engines plus safety technology and equipment, in addition to which the styling has been revised and the suspension has been revised.

The cars are bristling with useful safety systems; in fact too many to list in this brief report (however it's worth noting that when tested at the Vitara's launch in 2015, the model gained a Five Star Euro NCAP score).

Powering the new models are Suzuki's 'Boosterjet' turbocharged petrol engines, either a

three cylinder 1.0 litre unit, developing 111 PS, or a four cylinder 1.4 litre motor, producing 140 PS. That's said to be 17 per cent more than in the previous 1.6 litre model, and there's also greater torque available over a wider rev band; 220 Nm or 162 lb.ft, all the way from 1,500 to 4,000 rpm.

For this brief impressions feature I'll concentrate on the 1.4 litre model; I am aiming to bring you a full road test on Wheels-Alive on the 1.0 litre three cylinder model, in a few weeks.

The test vehicle for this brief report was top of the range SZ5 version, costing £25,299 in ALLGRIP 'Select' four wheel drive form, and with its smart black roof topped/turquoise paintwork. Further SZ5 features include 17 inch wheels, suede seat fabric, keyless entry and 'start' button, Adaptive Cruise Control, Dual Sensor Brake Support and a Panoramic sun roof.

The latest Vitaras are available in three trim levels (SZ4, SZ-T and SZ5), and the starting point price-wise for the line-up is the 1.0 litre SZ4, costing £16,999.

Helping to minimise emissions and fuel consumption across the range, are the application of weight-saving measures (including the use of high tensile steel) in the bodywork, plus Suzuki's Engine Auto Stop Start system.

It is also worth noting that, by contrast with many all wheel drive systems from other manufacturers, the ALLGRIP 'Select' four wheel drive system has only a minimal effect on performance and emissions.

I have driven several Suzukis equipped with the 1.4 litre Boosterjet engine, including the Swift Sport. For the Vitara the torque characteristics have been tweaked slightly differently.

With a healthy maximum torque output delivered all the way between 1,500 and 4,000 rpm (and that's a very wide range indeed!) the motor pulls very strongly at all road speeds. This helps makes this Vitara a real pleasure to drive.

During my test drive I found it to be comfortable, quiet-running and refined too, and progress at cruising speeds was hushed.

Wide-opening doors provide easy access to all five seats, and for rear seat passengers there's plenty of head and leg room (as well as for those in the front). The luggage compartment is spacious and the tailgate opens from bumper level.

The welcoming interior looks and feels well put together, and my co-pilot and I found that the accommodating seats were comfortable.

VERDICT

The previous generation Vitaras were impressive vehicles; I feel that the latest models are better still, and if you are looking for a versatile, well-built and distinctive SUV, they should definitely be on your shortlist.

Wheels-Alive Very Brief Tech. Spec:

2019 Suzuki Vitara

Price: This model £24,499 (test car, including optional turquoise paintwork with black roof, £25,299).

Engine: Euro 6, 1,373cc four cylinder 16 valve petrol, 140 PS @ 5,500 rpm; 220 Nm (162 lb.ft) torque from 1,500 to 4,000 rpm.

Transmission: Six speed manual; front wheel drive.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 10.2 sec.

Top speed: 124 mph.

Fuel consumption (Official figure):

‘Combined’: 46.3 mpg.

Citroën C5 Aircross SUV

This new five seater SUV from Citroën is all about comfort and practicality (although it is also packed with the latest safety and convenience features).

Notably, the suspension incorporates the company's acclaimed 'Progressive Hydraulic Cushions'. In addition, the 'inside story' includes three individual, same-width sliding rear seats, which are foldable and which feature backrest adjustment.

In the 'Flair' trim level, as applied to our test car, 'Advanced Comfort' seats are also included. The Flair name additionally indicates such features as 'Swirl' aluminium alloy road wheels, Citroën Connect Nav with TomTom Live services, ConnectedCAM Citroën, and a

reversing camera with ‘Top Rear Vision’.

For those seeking even more features, the ‘Flair Plus’ adds such niceties as special 19 inch aluminium alloy road wheels, a panoramic opening sun roof, keyless Entry and Start, wireless Smartphone charging and hands-free operation of the tailgate.

Our test vehicle was priced at £26,825, plus £545 for its metallic paintwork, making a total of £27,370.

Under the bonnet was a 129 bhp 1499cc four cylinder turbocharged diesel engine, which complies with Euro 6.2 designations relating to emissions performance. It proved to be an eager performer too, effortlessly pulling from quite low engine speeds (delivering 300 Nm or 221 lb.ft of torque from 1,750 rpm) and cruising quietly at higher road speeds.

The six speed manual gearbox on our car was slick and easy to operate.

Ride comfort was impressive, with the suspension soaking up the worst of the Wiltshire potholes that we encountered, and the seats were both welcoming and accommodating. Yet the car also handled well on the (mostly) twisty roads of our test route.

VERDICT

A likeable SUV, providing good performance and with reasonable leg and head room for both front and rear seat occupants, plus an enviably spacious and useful load compartment.

It was certainly comfortable too, and with a real life miles per gallon figure expected to be around 50 mpg or better, it should prove to be very much a cost-effective vehicle to run.

Wheels-Alive Very Brief Tech. Spec:

Citroën C5 Aircross FLAIR 130 BlueHDi SUV

Price: £26,825 (as tested, with including options, £27,370).

Engine: 1,499cc four cylinder turbo diesel (Euro 6.2), 129 hp @ 3,750 rpm; 300 Nm (221 lb.ft) torque @ 1,750 rpm.

Transmission: Six speed manual gearbox; front wheel drive.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 10.4 sec.

Top speed: 117 mph.

CO2: 110 g/km.

Fuel consumption (Official figures):

‘Combined’: 48.2 – 55.1 mpg.

Toyota RAV4 Dynamic 2.5 Hybrid 2WD

Since their arrival in the UK around four decades ago, Toyotas have earned – and continued with – a justifiable reputation for dependability and being easy and hassle-free to own.

In recent years the firm's hybrid models have added extra environmentally-friendly credentials to an already impressive list of attributes provided by the company's 'standard' petrol and diesel models.

Enter the latest hybrid version of the RAV4. Our test vehicle was the range-topping 'Dynamic' 2.5 two wheel drive hybrid variant, incorporating a four cylinder in-line 2.5 litre petrol engine plus electrical propulsion, in total providing an impressive output of 215 bhp.

The drivetrain set-up is intended to provide high torque output and low emissions; on some versions (but not our test car) intelligent all wheel drive provides peace of mind for dealing with all weather and road conditions.

This Toyota is not a ‘plug-in’ hybrid, but a ‘self-charging’ type, in which the electrical set-up is recharged as you drive.

The new RAV4 is certainly a distinctive design, and the new body shell helps to provide greater rigidity, less weight and a lower centre of gravity than previous models.

The newcomer is packed with safety features, including Toyota’s Safety Sense package, pre-collision systems and adaptive cruise control.

Convenience features abound too, and the five door body allows easy entry to and exit from the vehicle, for all occupants. Front seat occupants have plenty of space and those in the rear a reasonable amount, including generous shoulder room, and the luggage compartment is large and usefully shaped.

During a short road run I found the car was hushed and mechanical refinement was excellent, with seamless yet instant delivery of power from the petrol/electric motor set-up.

On the open road, and on some winding cross-country roads, the car was comfortable and handled well.

A realistic expectation for overall fuel economy promises to be in the region of 50 mpg.

VERDICT

An eye-catching SUV which feels well-engineered and performs as well as it looks, with built-in practicality and the well-respected name of Toyota to reassure buyers about long-term reliability.

Wheels-Alive Very Brief Tech. Spec:

Toyota RAV4 Dynamic 2.5 Hybrid 2WD

Price: £34,405.

Engine: 2,487cc four cylinder petrol + electric motor, 215 bhp total system output (internal combustion engine 176 bhp @ 5,700 rpm plus 221 Nm or 163 lb.ft @ 3,600 to 5,200 rpm)

Transmission: CVT automatic gearbox.

Performance:

Top speed: 112 mph.

0 – 62 mph: 8.4 secs.

CO2: 105 g/km.

Fuel consumption (Official figure): ‘Combined’: 49.2 to 51.2 mpg.

Suzuki Swift Sport

I was pleased to have the opportunity, at this event, to re-acquaint myself with Suzuki's Swift Sport, since test-driving an example for a week in the autumn of last year.

At that time I was full of praise for the car's overall competence, in particular the way that its 1.4 litre Boosterjet engine (notably featuring a small displacement, high torque turbocharger) delivered power and torque in quantity and over a wide rev range. I also liked its sporty, go-kart like handling, its practicality and the fact that it is well-equipped as standard, for a reasonable price…

So surely this time I would find something to carp about? Perhaps when I road-tested the

model I was viewing it with rose-tinted spectacles? Possibly it wasn't as much fun to drive as I remembered? Would I discover that in fact the compact sporty hatchback wasn't as practical and versatile as I had originally thought? Maybe the suspension, redeveloped for the latest generation of the Sport, didn't provide as supple a ride quality as I had felt during my week's test drive?

Well, the answer to each of those hypothetical questions is 'no'. As soon as I left the paddock area of the Castle Combe circuit and headed out for a tour of local roads (including fast dual carriageways and twisting lanes), once again I felt the sheer joy of driving a Swift Sport.

I enjoyed the instant and strong performance provided by that terrific Booster motor, and the sure-footed manner in which the car coped with rough 'B' road surfaces and the twisting, hilly routes I chose in north Wiltshire.

On returning to the circuit, my impressions of this model were precisely the same as when covering over 400 miles on my full road test last year. If you are interested in reading this, please go to: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/latest-suzuki-swift-sport-road-test/

VERDICT

Just a terrifically good motor car; well-engineered, fun to drive, versatile, comfortable and economical on fuel. Oh, and truly I can't think of a negative comment to make about it.

Wheels-Alive Very Brief Tech. Spec:

Suzuki Swift Sport

Price: £18,499.

Engine: Euro 6, 1,373cc four cylinder 16 valve petrol, 140 PS @ 5,500 rpm; 230 Nm (170 lb.ft) torque from 2,500 to 3,500 rpm.

Transmission: Six speed manual; front wheel drive.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 8.1 sec.

Top speed: 130 mph.

Fuel consumption (Official figure):

‘Combined’: 47.1 mpg.