

VITARA BREVIS

Suzuki's Vitara SUV is now smaller, funkier, cheaper to own, but also built to a price

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Vital Statistix

Colour coded dashboard is a nice touch, and as long as you look forward the Suzuki presents a good show - some hard plastics and rough edges are on the periphery



“PACKING A SIX-SPEED AUTO RATHER THAN A CVT IS A GOOD STEP FORWARD FOR DRIVABILITY.”

Suzuki has always been a cool company. The Japanese company is known as a small car specialist, with its much loved Swift and Swift Sport, plus other cult machines like the Wagon R and Cappuccino. It was way ahead of the small sport utility vehicle (SUV) craze with its Jimny - made since 1970, no less.

But it's also dabbled in 'big' stuff too, as it still makes one of the fastest production motorcycles around, the Hayabusa. It also previously made the Kizashi sedan, an excellent large sedan with more than a dash of sportiness.

Since 1988, Suzuki has made the Vitara. In its third generation, the Vitara was a mid-sized SUV, taking on the likes of the Honda CR-V or Toyota RAV4. At 4.5-metres long, it was one of the biggest cars in Suzuki's line-up, packing a 2.7-litre V6 for the Singapore market, while overseas ones got an even larger 3.2-litre V6.

From the outside, the new, fourth-gen Vitara seems to continue that trend. Visually, it's impressive, bringing the nameplate into the world of look-at-me crossovers with ease. The chunky, dark-coloured bashplate and fenders say 'SUV', while the squarish lines (see the raised bonnet?), dark wheels and LEDs are modern-looking touches. It even comes in a range of cool colours - this one is

'Savanna Ivory Metallic' and your choice of black or white contrast roof/pillar colours.

The outsized visuals mask a surprising fact about the Vitara, though: It's actually a much smaller vehicle. It's 32cm shorter than it used to be and has an engine half the size of the old 3.2-litre V6 - no surprise when you find out it's actually running on similar roots to the SX4 crossover. At this price point and size, it's up against the likes of the Nissan Qashqai 1.2, Honda's HR-V or even the Renault Captur.

That solves confusion between the Vitara name and what it used to be. In this range, the 378-litre boot and rear seats with lots of headroom - but not much knee room - make total sense. They fold down for more room, and there's a variable-height floor for the boot, with the floor piece featuring hard-wearing material on the other side.

One way the Vitara aims to get a leg over the competition though, is through its disproportionately long equipment list. A full-length sunroof might help distract passengers from the knee-chafing, while the driver enjoys keyless entry and start, paddle shifters, auto wipers and lights and there's also clear LED mainbeam headlights. Convenience comes from the nav and connectivity from the (sometimes laggy) Clarion head unit.



Clocks Off

Analogue clock with body-coloured trim: some liked it, some didn't



Clarion Call

Clarion infotainment system is locally installed and does the job but can be a bit clunky



You Know Something

...on snow. Same AWD system and underpinnings as the SX4 crossover means the Vitara can hack it off road, at least a little



“BEING A SUZUKI, THE VITARA HANDLES WELL WITH ITS STEERING DECENTLY ACCURATE AND NOT A HINT OF ROLL ON HARD CORNERING.”



Fun Roofies

The blacked-out upper portion (roof and pillars) is something of a trend in automotive design now. Also comes in contrast silver/grey for other shades



Being a Suzuki, the Vitara handles well with its steering decently accurate and not a hint of roll on hard cornering, although you will feel harsher bumps - and hear them too. Sound insulation seems a little insufficient, given the amount of noise that filters into the cabin at higher speeds or revs. The build quality seems sturdy, although some parts - like the door panel plastics and hinges - remind you the car's built to a cost (in Hungary, no less).

Packing a six-speed auto rather than a CVT is a good step forward for drivability, although it's very obvious when shifting. Overall, the performance is par for the small crossover course - 0-100km/h takes a long time, but the acceleration is entirely useable in day-to-day life, while the Vitara is doggedly frugal with petrol, averaging less than 7.0L/100km even in heavy traffic conditions.

That's impressive because unlike most small or inexpensive crossovers, the Vitara still packs all-wheel drive - it has a dedicated snow mode (there's also a sport mode) with a lockable differential and hill descent control, so you do retain a modicum of off-road capability and bragging rights. In a sense it's the shadow of the old Vitara still present.

There's little doubt the Vitara will be pocket-friendly: Besides the low cost and frugality, Suzuki dealer Champion Motors also chucks in five-years' free servicing (in addition to a five-year warranty) with the Premium model, which is quite a significant convenience.

But it's best to forget that car, as the new one is quite a different creature altogether, and obviously aimed at a modern crossover buyer, who looks for a fashionable design, friendly price, small form factor and cheap running costs. The new Vitara may be shorter, smaller and less powerful but it's grown in other ways.

Suzuki Vitara Premium

ENGINE
1,586cc, 16V, inline 4

MAX POWER
118bhp at 6000rpm

MAX TORQUE
156Nm at 4400rpm

GEARBOX
6-speed automatic

TOP SPEED
180km/h

0-100KMH
13.0 seconds

FUEL EFFICIENCY
5.7L/100km

CO₂
131g/km

PRICE
\$108,900 with COE

AVAILABILITY
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