



Suzuki Grand Vitara

Finally another real one

Car review | Modern SUV's have become more image-cars and less all-terrain vehicles. That makes sense, for many people buy such a car solely for its space and appearance. This makes paying for unused technology a waist of money. But what if an SUV is used when going off skiing? When the car does need to tow a trailer? Or when it is taken off the beaten track? Fortunately there is another real SUV on the market: the new Suzuki Grand Vitara.

Suzuki has faith in the newcomer for the presentation consists of two parts: an on-road test and an off-road test. Before the stories (whether or not tall stories) about heroic actions in the field burst loose, first a calm story about the adventures on solid grounds.

Spot the differences

It literally starts calm. At the moment of the introduction the Grand Vitara is available with two engines that both perform not more than satisfactorily. The engine is audible at all times and has to work hard to perform. Over longer distances this can be rather tiresome and many drivers almost automatically slow down to maintain the tranquillity.



The 3-door Grand Vitara is only available with a 1.6-litre engine. The 5-door version is only available with a 2-litre engine. Why the 3-doors is not available with this larger engine is a mystery. An even bigger mystery is the difference in technology. Both models have 4-wheel drive but only the 5-door version has low gearing; a extremely useful provision for driving in heavy terrain. This is even stranger still because a shorter car in particular is naturally better suited for heavy off-road work.

The looks of the 3- and 5-door Grand Vitara are different too. This isn't just restricted to the length, the wheelbase and one more or less door. Even the design of the headlights, rear lights and grille are adjusted to the expected buyers market. Even though yours truly thinks the 3-door looks better, the 5-doors is tested because that is the one that is expected to sell more.

Space

There is a practical reason for choosing the 5-doors: this one is considerably more spacious and is therefore able to carry not only the luggage of two people for two days but also extensive photographic equipment. Even then there is more than enough room left on the backseat for two adults. The whole interior is affluent with pockets and compartments. Also the door pockets and the glove compartment are well sized. In the front the Grand Vitara offers much head- and legroom. The seats are comfortably firm and what's more: big.



There is a simple explanation for the increased space: the new Grand Vitara is longer and wider than its predecessor. Good news for a car like this one: the successor is lower than before. Immediately this results in a better road holding qualities and higher safety levels. Even from the drivers seat the car is noticeably less high. The test driver therefore doesn't sit on a high wobbly commando tower but is just slightly higher than average and that gives a relaxed view over the rest of the traffic.

On Road

During the test drive through Holland, Belgium and Germany every possible road, road type and traffic situation is given a chance. As mentioned before, the performance on the motorway is satisfactory but this is surely not a motorway-devil.

In city traffic the Grand Vitara is surprisingly manoeuvrable. The car feels less big than it actually is and easily lets itself steer through narrow little streets. It sounds contradictory but the power steering is unpleasant. After turning the steering wheel it takes a fraction of a second for the front wheels to react and even in the long run one hardly gets used to that. However, that is made up for by the firmly suspended

chassis, which makes the contact with the road much better than that of luxurious SUV's. Add to it that this new Grand Vitara is much sturdier than its predecessors, which means that the road holding can definitely be described as "European".



Off road: theory

At last, it is time! The Grand Vitara has been tested on the public roads. Now it is time to do something that most other SUV's have already given up on: all-terrain driving! This is not a car that thinks for itself. With a dial on the dashboard the driver determines how the power is distributed on to the wheels.

The first possibility is the permanent 4-wheel drive with which all test miles on the metalled roads were driven. This option is meant for day-to-day usage and is also suitable for a track and snow and ice conditions. When the track becomes a mud bath, the snow is up to a foot high or the road turns into an ice-rink, then the middle differential can be used. The next option selects the low gearing. This is a second gearbox, which halves the speed of the car, but doubles the torque. This is the secret weapon of the Grand Vitara, because competing 4-wheel drives in this price class are not equipped with low gearing. Unfortunately the middle differential is always blocked when low gearing is selected, which makes it useless as an aid for towing heavy trailers on the metalled road.

Off road: action!

So far the theory, what really matters is what all this nice technology does in practice. As soon as the toughest all terrain option is selected the driver would think that the car completely changes its appearance at the same time. When the first wheel hits the sand, the whole character changes. Everything that made the car less refined on the road now makes the car particularly capable. Although the future diesel engine would perform better in this terrain, the character of the 2-litre 4-cylinder engine is well suited for all terrain driving. While overtaking on single carriageways requires the utmost, climbing a steep gradient that would be impossible on foot, turns out to be remarkably easy for the Grand Vitara (in front 29 degrees, in the back 27 degrees). Thanks to the low gearing downhill doesn't present the slightest problem either.



Particularly in loose sand one feels how the mechanism works and how it gets the car out of any situation. Because it is noticeable what goes on under the hood, the driver and the car are getting better used to each other's ways all the time. When the car slides through the mud at full speed, the earlier rather awkward power steering is now ideal to keep the car under control. The weak handle of the handbrake feels as if it is not capable of doing anything but this too keeps the car in place even on the most bizarre gradients.

The over 50 metres deep sandpit that is normally only visited by monstrous diggers and huge trucks is a great playground for the Grand Vitara. The deep tracks of the machines and apparently impossible gradients are not a problem but merely a new challenge. It lasted all day long and the Grand Vitara conquered it all. Suzuki's new slogan therefore is obvious: "not afraid of anything".



Conclusion

A double conclusion for a double test. The first part of the test drive was carried out on the public road. The new Suzuki Grand Vitara scores with a successful look, a lot of space and a rewarding road holding. However, this third generation of the Grand Vitara is less quiet, quick and comfortable than SUV's that are purely meant to be spacious passenger cars and which have lost all capacities as all-terrain vehicles.

Off-road the experience with the Grand Vitara is completely different. All refinement that has been sacrificed on the metalled road is more than put right off-road. This is not an SUV that has forgotten what it is all about: with the Suzuki Grand Vitara anything and everything goes. Finally here is another real SUV (Ivo Kroone). ■



Specifications

Suzuki Grand Vitara 2.0 5-door

Size and weight

Length x width x height	447 x 181 x 170 cm
Wheelbase	264 cm
Kerb weight	1.480 kg
Trailer	750 kg
Trailer - braked	1.850 kg
Fuel capacity	66 l
Luggage space	398/758 l
Tyre size	225/70R16

Engine and performance



Capacity	1995 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	140 PS @ 6000 rpm
Max torque	183 Nm @ 4000 rpm
Drive	four wheel drive
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	12.5 secs
Top speed	175 km/h
Average mileage	9.1 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	11.6 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	7.6 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	220 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 15,675
Price base model	Â£ 12,875