



Suzuki Alto

The devil is in the details

Car review | With small cars it is all about the details. Every extra kilometer per litre is pure profit. Every gram less CO2 emissions may reduce taxes. A centimetre more on the outside results in valuable extra space on the inside. Suzuki carefully studied the competition and now introduces the all new Alto. Suzuki's latest model is just a little larger, a tad quicker and still more economical than its main rivals.

They must have been bummed out, those Suzuki dealers. In 2006 Suzuki discontinued the Alto and ever since the dealers have missed many orders. But the car maker didn't sit still. Suzuki carefully studied what customers want in a small car and designed the new Alto to suit their needs.

Equipment

For example, it turned out that many customers aren't just loyal to the Suzuki brand, but are specifically loyal to the Alto. That is why the new Alto is not a radical new model, but just an evolution of the predecessor. Although the car grew (12 cm wider, 1 cm taller and exactly the same length), its cheeky looks are still unmistakable. It is like you knew someone as a child, but now instantly recognise them as a mature person.



And "mature" is the key word, because the Alto became less of a budget car and more of a serious car. Many compact cars have concave dashboards which are placed as low as possible to give the suggestion of space. Instead the Alto has a large, convex-shaped dashboard and that gives a more mature feel to the car. Also the materials used feel durable and more

solid than usual.

On top of that the standard trim level is excellent for a car in this price range. The "Exclusive" version driven here is fitted with air conditioning (not even an option on the previous Alto!), a radio with connector for an MP3-player, a rev counter, electronic stability control and light alloy wheels. Because of this even the top spec version offers exceptional value for money.

Space

The space in front of the cabin is fine. With the seat slid all the way to the back even tall drivers cannot reach the pedals! Regrettably the (integrated) headrests are not made for tall drivers: they are too low and therefore do not contribute to the safety of the car. Also, the mirrors cannot be adjusted far enough.



As usual with cars this size the space on the back seat is only suitable for children. To put it mildly: adults should be limber to fit in the back. The boot is small (129 litres) and hard to reach because of a huge threshold.

Roadholding

The Alto especially distinguishes itself from the competition with excellent roadholding. The Alto is fitted with power steering as standard, but doesn't steer artificially light. Next to that Suzuki found a great balance between comfort and handling.



The Alto feels very stable and "bounces" much less than other small/light cars. In tight corners the Alto is very grippy and even at high speed the car reacts very predictably. Thanks to this refined suspension the Alto feels much more mature than other small cars.



Therefore the car isn't especially exciting or dynamic, but does feel right at home in the big city. Most of the test drive was done in Rome (Italy) and in that permanent chaos the Alto feels right at home. The outside mirrors are disturbingly small giving poor all around vision. A city car should especially have "big ears" so that the driver always knows what's happening around the car.

The Alto is fitted with powerful brakes, but when braking from (very) high speeds the car does tend to

swerve a little.

Fuel efficiency

For now the Alto is only available with a 1.0 litre engine. This engine has three cylinders and that makes an Alto fuel efficient by nature. However, a three-cylinder runs less quiet than the traditional four cylinder engine. Because all other noises have been greatly reduced, the characteristic ruffling three-cylinder noise is especially noticeable.

The Alto uses 4.4 litres of petrol per 100 km on average and that's a little more efficient than other small cars. Only miniatures like the Smart ForTwo and Toyota iQ are significantly less thirsty.



Performance

The Alto 1.0 performs well. Not just in city traffic, but also on the highway the Alto is quick and spritely. However gearbox ratios don't seem to fit common speed limits in Europe. For example, 50 km/h is just too fast for third gear, but too slow for fourth. Many drivers will therefore systematically drive either too fast or too slow.

The Alto is also available with a (four-speed) automatic gearbox, but this uses obsolete technology. Because of this the Alto automatic is significantly slower and less fuel efficient than the manual versions. On the other hand, the automatic gearbox makes the Alto even more comfortable.



Conclusion

"Buyers of small cars are looking for a bargain", must have been on the minds of the Suzuki engineers. Therefore the seventh generation of the Alto is more fuel efficient, is a little bit quicker and yet roomier than the competition.

But the Alto isn't just about the numbers. The Alto makes a big step forward as to comfort and refinement. The materials used, the build quality and especially the sublime suspension, give this tiny car a very solid and mature feel.

In short: Suzuki has scrutinized the competition and it shows. The car is well designed up to the finest detail. ■



Specifications

Suzuki Alto 1.0 SZ4

Size and weight



Length x width x height	350 x 160 x 147 cm
Wheelbase	236 cm
Kerb weight	855 kg
Trailer	unknown
Trailer - braked	unknown
Fuel capacity	35 l
Luggage space	129/774 l
Tyre size	155/65R14

Engine and performance



Capacity	996 cc
Cylinders / valves	3/4
Max power	68 PS @ 6000 rpm
Max torque	90 Nm @ 3400 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	14 secs
Top speed	155 km/h
Average mileage	4.4 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	5.5 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	3.8 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	103 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 7,960
Price base model	Â£ 6,795