



Suzuki Ignis

Cold as ice

Car programme presenters are keen to show how they cruise through Europe in all luxury in Aston Martins, Ferrari's and other exotics. Last year, Autozine's editors drove to the Autosalon in Geneva in a Mercedes CLK. Again this year a visit to the most important car show in the world has been planned, but this time with an extremely modest vehicle. Could it work with a Suzuki Ignis?

The Suzuki Ignis already demonstrated its ability to cover long distances with the Ignis Sport during a sun-drenched drive to Monaco. This time the snow-covered mountains of Switzerland are on the agenda, which is why the 4-wheel drive was chosen. In countries like the Netherlands this is recommended as a safety precaution in case of extreme weather conditions. With recent mild winters the actual benefits are questionable. The weather forecast for Switzerland predicts heavy snow and bitterly cold temperatures. The test car is therefore equipped with winter tyres and non-skid chains are taken as a precaution.

The Ignis is a miraculous mix of hatchback, space wagon and all-terrain car. Whatever type of car it is: all three offer lots of space. The necessary photography equipment and luggage for three days fit in the back easily. The interior offers enough room for all sorts of snacks. The cup holders in the doors are so big that they hold litre bottles!

The Ignis 4x4 is only available as a 5-door car, which gives easy access to the back seat. The back seat offers enough room for two adults, but for a long distance drive like this one it's size is not that appealing. The front seats have little adjustment options and do not offer as much sideways

support as the sport seats of the Ignis Sport. The steering wheel is not adjustable at all. Even though, yours truly is comfortable and the Suzuki is ready for take-off.

Sunrise

Traffic around Antwerp and Brussels could cause major delays. That is why this journey starts early in the morning, even before sunrise. It is still surprising though to see a large amount of traffic at this untimely hour.

Even during the first few miles the Ignis 4x4 pleasantly surprises. Usually it is quite obvious when a car is a 4-wheel drive. The power of the engine is distributed to the front and the rear wheels and because of the extra mechanics needed, such cars generally move less smoothly. Furthermore, a 4-wheel drive requires more engine power and consequently more fuel. The Ignis 4x4 ignores all of this and eases along, over the motorway as if it were a small limousine! Even at high speeds it feels as if there is lots of extra power. It is still early; there are plenty of opportunities for that to come!



After a short delay due to road works to Antwerp's ring road, Brussels is left behind before the start of the rush hour. What follows is the most boring part of the journey: the almost 120 mile long E411 motorway that crosses from the top left corner to the bottom right corner of Belgium. According to the central display under the windscreen the temperature is 15 degrees below zero and on this boring motorway a good pace is held. As a result of this the planned stop to fuel up at the cheap petrol station in Luxemburg is sacrificed. With the dial indicating less than "E", the GPS points to a tiny garage in a little hamlet nearby. It turned out to be a long break since the lock of the fuel cap had frozen. Too much force and the key snaps off, too little and the test-drive ends right here. After determined action of the garage owner the fuel cap gives in. Not a good system, a fuel cap with its own lock.

White road

Now that the tank is full, speed is increased and within an hour the border of Luxemburg is left behind. In France the landscape becomes hilly. On steep hills, crawler lanes are built. According to warning signs, HGV's will not manage more than 20 mph. The Ignis however also struggles on the hills. In fifth gear the speed almost drops to 60 mph and only by stepping on it in forth gear 75 mph is reached. Due to its height the Ignis turns out to be sensitive to side winds. The steering wheel needs to be held firmly and even then the car sometimes swerves precariously.



In this cold weather and with a headwind, hills and high average speeds fuel consumption is around 23 mpg, so it takes several more stops to fuel up before the first planned rest is reached. The "White Road", from France to Switzerland, is an impressive sequence of long tunnels and enormous bridges through a breathtaking mountainous landscape. For those who are interested in discovering how these kinds of structures are built, there is a UFO-shaped information centre at the foot of one of the bridges. Unfortunately all the information is in French, but the pictures speak for themselves.



After another two hours the hotel in Geneva is reached. Thanks to the good seats and the silent engine this drive was hardly tiring. When the GPS indicates that Mont Blanc is only 52 miles ahead, temptation is high to jump back in the car to go out and take a few pictures to show back home. Common sense prevails over sentiment though, for a visit to the Autosalon is demanding enough.

Autosalon

The next day the biggest challenge of the whole journey awaits. The hotel and the exhibition are about 10 miles apart,

but the drive would end up taking over 2 hours. The presenter of the only English speaking radio station in the region, WRG FM 88.4, optimistically points out that all roads around Geneva are congested with traffic heading for the Autosalon. Cars with number plates from all wind directions slowly move towards the car park. Of course none of the traffic controllers speaks any English, which adds to the confusion among the journalists. Who is going where? Where does the shuttle bus leave? How to get to the entrance?



At the end of the day the Ignis is one of the last remaining cars in a cold and dark car park. A bit further on is the airport where the private-jets of all the big names in the industry leave for home. We are spending another night in Geneva to drive back to the Netherlands the next day via the ski resorts.



A treacherous undertaking

That night the temperature drops to minus 28 and there is about a metre and a half of fresh snow. In the parking bays in front of the hotel the only things visible are some mirrors and antennas sticking out of the snow. What follows is a treacherous undertaking of digging the car out of the snow,

starting it with difficulty and then pushing it until it is free from the snow. At least, that is the drill for most hotel guests. The Ignis however starts without any problems and is the only one that makes its way out of the snow by itself. Even to the French, who as if by magic have found out how to ask for help in fluent English, the Ignis is more than welcome to lend a hand.



As a true salesman yours truly proudly explains that this is one of the most economical 4-wheel drives on the Dutch market. Because it is not an all-terrain car, the Ignis has relatively narrow tyres, which is not an advantage in the snow. The tyre pressure per square centimetre is high, which causes the car not to drive on the snow, but to cut through it. To express his gratitude one of the hotel guests offers some tips on the prettiest route towards the motorway.

Skiing

During the drive over winding mountain roads the Ignis is even more convincing than on the incoming journey. On the motorway the Ignis is "merely" surprisingly fast and comfortable for a car in this price range, but now all expectations are exceeded. No gradient is too steep and no mass of snow is too big. The only scary thing is when the photographer disappears into the snow up to his knees to take a picture from the ideal position!



In several ski resorts many cars are struggling desperately to deal with the snow. In the knowledge that the problem free Ignis is a lot cheaper than most of these cars, satisfaction is even greater. However, do take into consideration that a 4-wheel drive is not the answer to everything. Mainly thanks to winter tyres the grip is very good, but on an ice-covered surface even a 4x4 is hopelessly lost. Besides, the Ignis is equipped with the most simple type of 4-wheel drive: distribution to all the wheels, but no intelligent provision to distribute the power optimally. This adds to the explanation why the car is so favourably priced.

Weather the weather

Back in Holland the winter weather decides to strike. Traffic crawls along the motorway, of which only the slow lane is used. The experiences from France and Switzerland fresh in its memory, the Ignis is not impressed and is the only one to take the fast lane. What a way to beat the rush hour traffic! As an encore this budget 4-wheel drive demonstrates that in the city a quick acceleration from a traffic light is possible even in this weather. At 6 PM the test vehicle is safely back in the editor's garage.

A day later it became apparent that many a journalist and press advisor got stuck in Geneva. Because of the winter weather air travel has become impossible in Holland and

airlines are using busses to get stranded passengers home. Just like on Top Gear, the car has beaten the airplane!



Conclusion

"It will be better than you expect", a spokesman from Suzuki said prior to the drive from Holland to Geneva. "This car has exceeded all expectations", is the conclusion three days later. The only disadvantages are the sensitivity to side winds, the few adjustment options to seats and steering wheel and the fact that the car radio cannot play MP3's.

Furthermore the Ignis is a unique car that has all the advantages, but none of the disadvantages of a 4x4. To begin with it has much inside space and the active safety of a 4-wheel drive. Thanks to the splendid outfit and the silent engine the car is extremely comfortable too. The compact measurements make the Ignis practical in city traffic. And for all of this Suzuki even asks a very reasonable price.

A wintry ride in the Suzuki Ignis 4x4 therefore feels like a test where the teacher is handing out the answers by mistake.

Or a supermarket with long queues for the check out, except for the one that nobody has spotted. Or being in a traffic jam where one lane is completely empty, which nobody else is using. Over 1,200 wintry miles provide this privileged feeling in the Ignis 4x4 (Ivo Kroone). ■



Specifications

Suzuki Ignis 1.5 GLX 4Grip

Size and weight

Length	377 cm
Width	161 cm
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Wheelbase	236 cm
Kerb weight	985 kg
Trailer	350 kg
Trailer - braked	800 kg
Fuel capacity	41 l
Luggage space	236 l

Engine and performance

Capacity	1490 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	99 bhp @ 5900 rpm
Max torque	133 Nm @ 4100 rpm
Drive	vierwielaandrijving
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	10.4 secs
Top speed	165 km/h
Average mileage	7 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	9 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	6 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	unknown

Price

Price	£ 9,699
Price base model	£ 7,699

