



Suzuki: SJ / SAMURAI

This is an iconic 4X4 that's got a huge fan club in every country in the world. The reasons are its charming character, its incredible off-road capabilities due to its short wheelbase, light weight and small dimensions (can fit into places the big 4X4 cannot go). It is also a never-say-die vehicle and their owners love them. Currently I have two of them myself and have owned 15 Suzuki 4X4's over the past nine years!

This is one of the most sensible cars to buy in the UK and ship to SA! These little

Suzuki jeeps are probably the most over-priced used vehicle on the South African market, but cheap in the UK. Although about 10 000 of these jeeps were sold in SA they are very scarce second hand as the current owners would not sell them, and if you find one, it will sell second hand for more than they were priced when new!!!!

The reasons are simple.

- Great fun off-road and on-road with the roof down
- Unique appearance that turn heads wherever you go
- Incredible off road capabilities
- Extremely reliable and easy to maintain
- Very easy to modify or alter to personal taste
- Thieves don't steal Suzuki's, they are too conspicuous!
- Everybody in SA wants one!

Not all Suzuki's are worth buying however. Here is a quick overview:

*note: avoid the hard top station wagon (SW) whose roof cannot be removed, do buy the convertible. As the SW is not popular in South Africa it is not worth much money wise. Convertibles in a good nick

however sell for as much as R70 000 in SA due to its high popularity!

Here's a model overview:

-SJ410: with a little 970cc (1L) engine it's VERY slow and underpowered. It is also called the Santana. (They were made in Spain, and built quality was not as great as the Japanese SJ's) They also had an ugly dashboard and very uncomfortable seats.

-SJ413: this is where you should start looking. They came with a 1324cc (1.3L) engine, 5 speed gearbox and better interior. Note that later models only had the wider axles that improved dodgy handling and stability dramatically. Notice the wider wheel arches on the later models on the pictures. At this stage the SJ also received a long wheel base (LWB) convertible model in its model line up. The LWB does not offer the same incredible ramp-over angle as the SWB, but is much more practical and comfortable for those who need the extra space or who plan to do long bush trips with a SJ.



SJ413 SW (1986 version, note the smaller plastic strips around the wheel arches on the white SJ VS. the later, 1988 blue one's wider wheel arch extensions)



SJ410 (note the front grille)

-**Samurai**: this is the one you want. All had the wider axles, improved suspension and an even newer dashboard. Has a single "S" Suzuki logo on the grille. (some very early Samurais still had the "SUZUKI" word on the grille however)



Here one can see the difference in Samurai 1300 grilles from my personal 2004 Suzuki-collection: Green = 1988 ; white = 1993; red = 1997 (the '96 onwards are usually referred to as "coily", due to coil spring suspension)



SJ413 LWB Convertible (a later model, note the bigger body-colour wheel arch extensions)

What to look for when buying

These Suzuki's might be reliable, but if neglected they can be troublesome and have unnecessary bills to rectify. If you follow these guidelines you can prevent unpleasant surprises:

-engine: open the oil filler cap and check for "white mayonnaise" under the cap. This is water that contaminated the oil due to a head gasket that's about to blow. (you might also be able to see it on the dipstick) Deduct about £300 to rectify this problem and remember that the engine might have already overheated, so expect a shortened engine life. Also listen for any funny noises that indicate a problematic water pump which can wreck the whole engine, should it break. Deduct £200 to replace. Lastly, a rough running engine when warmed up that is smoky (while being revved) indicate the end of it's lifespan. To recondition the engine in SA would cost R5000-R6000 (if you export it with the "shot" engine) and about £800 in the UK to fix.

-gearbox: must be easy to shift gears,

even when cold. If this is a problem, deduct R2500 (SA price) to replace the synchromesh. A whine from the gearbox is a bit more expensive to fix, so it is a good idea to buy a second hand gearbox from e-bay.co.uk for about £30.

-transfer case / 4WD shifter: To check if the 4WD work (and there's not any mud around), put it in 4L, and make sure the front wheel hubs are both locked (if equipped), and pull away in reverse VERY quickly. If there's any wheel spin from the rear wheels, something is not working on the 4WD. This can cost as little as £20 to rectify, but it's probably going to cost closer to £100 to fix. A soft whine from the front diff and transfer case is normal, but a loud whine from the transfer case (or gearbox) can mean water entered the transfer case from river driving and started to rust internally. Budgeted for a used transfer case from e-bay. (£50 should be enough)

-bodywork: Rust on Suzuki's are common (because many had a life at the coast or it can be due to the grit / road salt put on the roads for snow and car wasn't washed regularly), but the price of the Suzuki should indicate rust. Rust

would cost between R7000-R15 000 to fix (depending on the greediness of the panel beater) and add R2000 to the figure if the car is a metallic colour. The one advantage on a rusty Suzuki is that you can choose your favourite colour when you get it fixed, as the whole jeep need to be re-sprayed. How to check for rust: if it's not visible from the outside bodywork, check underneath the wheel arches and the rest of the under carriage for rust spots. Remember that even if there is a small rust spot, it can mean that there's other spots that can be about to make themselves apparent. Pro-Tech panel beaters in Pretoria charge about R8000 for a rust job, and their work is of a high quality.

-How much to pay for a Suzuki: (prices are for 1300cc cabrio's)

*with mechanical problem and rust: £0-400

*with rust OR mechanical problem only: £400-600

*no rust or mechanical problems: £600+ (depending on overall condition and mileage)

These Suzuki's can be very cheap to modify / alter according to taste. It's like a margarita pizza. Taste is good but it's dull. You have to add your own toppings like pepperoni (mud terrain tyres), mushrooms (good sound system), extra cheese (more powerful engine), jalape-



An aftermarket diff-lock is the only modification required to idle through a "situation" like this and put the big 4X4's to shame.

Some ideas on modifications

-The sky is the limit, or perhaps your wallet. Do some internet research on ideas; you will not believe how much info is available on Suzuki conversions. You can contact me as well and I'll share my knowledge I've gained over the years with you with pleasure. Remember, you are most likely to own your SJ/Samurai for the rest of your life so you can really treat yourself with some modifications.

-Get the tyres changed to a good all-terrain or mud-terrain type as this makes a massive difference in muddy or rocky conditions.

-The biggest asset on a SJ you can add is a diff-lock. It is R4000 very well spend!

-A Vitara 1.6 engine (71KW) is really worth considering if you want more power. Another alternative would be the Jimny's 1300 16valve. In both applications you'll need the gear box and ECU (computer box) as well as the keys and control modules, while it is a good idea to get the radiator and starter as well.

£300 should be enough for the complete Vitara 1.6 16v conversions required components while the Jimny's kit would be closer to £600, thus making the Vitara's conversion more sensible. Allow R1500-R2000 fitting cost in SA, and you should get about R5000 for your old SJ 1.3 engine and gearbox as these items are very scarce in SA. If you don't want any electronics in your SJ, have a look at the Vitara 1.6 8valve carburettor. It has 55KW opposed to the 1.3 SJ/Samurai's 47KW.

-Because the SJ/Samurai is quite noisy at high speeds, a good sound system is required if you still want to listen to the radio at 120km/h. All you need however is a good CD/front loader, two 120W 6" front speakers and two 350W 6X9" speakers in the rear. A cheap and simple solution, while you can consider an amp if you're serious about your sound.

-If the front seats are not comfortable enough for you, get yourself a pair of e.g. Fiesta 3dr seats. They shouldn't cost more than £20 from your local salvage yard.

-If you want a hard top fibre glass canopy you can buy a new one for R6500 or a used one for R4000 in SA.

-The LWB version came standard with removable two-piece fibre glass canopies, so make sure it still has them. An easy conversion which is quite popular with the LWB is a pick up conversion. This involves a simple, removable bulk head that's fitted behind the front seats and make the SJ / Samurai LWB a very versatile 4X4 for a farm.



An Australian Samurai LWB rigged for Outback expeditions.

