

Suzuki Vitara: (first generation)



A vehicle that kind of started the whole "small SUV" revolution and very quickly became a huge sales success all over the world.

It was placed above the SJ/Samurai as a more luxurious, comfortable and spacious 4X4 which still retained good off-road capabilities. The Vitara did not quite rival the SJ/Samurai off-road due to its more car-like independent front suspension, but offered a much, much better on-road ride / handling combination. This, together with a higher spec level and much more interior space, make the Vitara 1.6 16valve suitable for long distance driving. The Vitara also make

a perfect city vehicle due to its compact dimensions and good fuel consumption (for a 4X4) An automatic is also available, but unless you need an automatic, stick to the manual.

The Vitara was called the Escudo in Japan, and in the USA Sidekick. The Americans also sold it as the Chevrolet or Geo Tracker. Some "grey import" Escudo's can be found in the UK, and the good thing about Escudo's is aircon was a standard fitment.

3 body styles were offered:

1- 3 door convertible: The engine line-up started with a 8-valve 1.6L, producing 55KW, followed by a 8-valve 1.6L with fuel injection with 61KW, and then lastly a 1.6L 16valve with 71KW. Not the ideal long distance cruiser, but its a convertible that offers huge fun off-road and its very easy to manoeuvre around parking lots, due to its short

wheel base (SWB) layout.



A fibre glass canopy was available as an optional extra, and this is a very useful accessory to have, e.g. for the winter months.



2- 3 door station wagon (SW): Avoid. This body style was never sold in SA and would be worthless as people prefer the 3dr convertible or 5dr SW.



3- 5 door station wagon (SW):

Perfect for those who need a practical, small, 5-seater SUV. Power came from a 1.6L 16valve with a useful 71KW and making it suitable for the open road. The long wheel base (LWB) setup make it less capable off-road than the SWB cabrio, but offers much more usable luggage space. A more powerful Grand Vitara 2.0L V6 was also offered, but fuel wise its quite thirsty. The 2.0TD was never sold in SA, so parts would be a problem – avoid the diesel.



ALL South African spec Vitara's were sold with aircon, electric windows, power steering and central locking as standard. The UK versions were not, and aircon especially is very scarce. Make sure that the one you're interested in has everything but aircon, because aircon can be fitted afterwards by an aircon specialist in SA for R4000-R6000, using used parts.

Prices: Bear in mind that these 4X4, even old ones, are still popular in the UK and this can keep prices high, so be careful not to overspend.

£0-500: might have rust or a mechanical problem

£500- £1000: must be in a very good condition and avoid high milers.

£1000+: getting a bit expensive (and touching the price bracket of the second generation Grand Vitara), so for this amount of money it must be in an excellent condition with low mileage.

Modifications:

-The first thing to change for off-road work is the tyres, or if you're "penny wise", wait till the current tyres are worn. Then get yourself a set of all- terrain or mud-terrain tyres.

-An aftermarket diff-lock will sort out the shortfall in off-road capabilities for those who do serious 4X4 driving. Lock Right diff-locks go for about R5000 in SA



Note: A "fatboy" version were sold in the UK with very wide tyres and wheel arch extensions. The problem with the "fatboys" is the cost of replacing the tyres, and because it's a very odd size, getting hold of these tyres can be very difficult. Avoid the Fatboy, unless you're willing to give it a suspension / body lift and put some big off-road tyres on it. If you are willing to spend R12 000 on a Fatboy, you can make it look like mine. You won't regret it!

