



2006 Suzuki Grand Vitara by Rick Trawick



One of the foundations of Suzuki's product line is the Grand Vitara compact SUV. All new for 2006, the new Grand Vitara now features a 2.7 liter V6 as standard equipment. With 185 horsepower, there is plenty of power for the usual SUV tasks, like scaling mountain trails, towing 3,000 pound boats or fording muddy streams. Actually, how many SUV's ever really do that kind of stuff! The reality is much of the hardware and fabulous engineering is never used for its intended purpose. Hence the emergence of the "crossover" vehicle, but I digress.

The Grand Vitara is a true SUV, quite capable off-road as well as on. The fully independent suspension and short overhangs make rough roads and most obstacles a snap. On the road, the ride is well controlled but firm, much improved over the previous model. Handling is never an SUV strong suit but the Grand Vitara corners without tremendous lean and the ESP (electronic stability program) on our test car will start engaging if you push it too far. The switchable 4-wheel-drive allows high and low range 4-wheel-drive and a



neutral position that comes in handy if you want to tow the Grand Vitara behind a motorhome. There is also a 4 Low Lock mode for heavy off-roading or snow, however, there is no 2-wheel-drive-only mode. Two transmissions are available, a 5-speed manual or a 5-speed electronically controlled automatic, as on our test car.



Interior wise, the Grand Vitara is quite roomy for 4 with room for a 5th passenger in the center of the rear seat. With a 5th passenger, the rear becomes a little tight. The front bucket seats appear nice with standard fore-aft, rake and on the driver's side, tilt adjustment. But they have a maximum comfort time of about two hours, after that and you find yourself

looking for any excuse to get out of the seat. The rest of the interior is up to snuff with controls that are well placed and the automatic temperature controlled HVAC works well and is reasonably quiet even on high speed. Nice features of the premium models like our test car are a 6-disc CD changer sound system and a keyless entry and start system.

Just have the keyfob in your pocket and the doors can be unlocked simply by pressing a small button on the door handle. Unlock buttons are also



conveniently mounted on the passenger and rear hatch door handles. The rear hatch is a door style affair which swings open toward the curb side giving access to over 24 cubic feet of space behind the rear seat. The 60/40 split rear seats flip and tumble forward to raise the cargo capacity to almost 70 cubic feet of space.

Well priced in its class, the Grand Vitara provides a great value. Our very well equipped model was priced at xxxxxx. Other Grand Vitara's start at \$19,794. All Suzuki cars and trucks carry a 7 year, 100,000 mile powertrain warranty. Look for more information at www.suzukiauto.com.

Don't forget the subscriber contest!

Don't miss out! We are looking to make a significant increase in our readership. I know all of our faithful readers have told friends about the website, but sometimes they forget to sign up, or they loose the address or something. So to encourage everyone to talk us up and get their friends to subscribe, we are having a subscription contest. Here's how it works:

Every reader who gets two of their friends to sign up will get a free, one-year subscription to our print magazine when it is introduced. Yes, we

are going to really have a print magazine you can hold in your hand, and when we do, you will receive the first year free! But don't stop there, sign up 5 or more people and you will get an official Cars & Places travel mug. And the top prize will go to the one person who signs up the most people, that special person will receive an embroidered Cars & Places jacket!

We have added a space on the subscription form called "How did you hear about us?", so make sure your friends put your name in that space! And no fair signing up your "other" email addresses!

Let's get started and spread the word! You only have from now until the end of May so get going!

The next Mazdaspeed



We were allowed a peek at the all new Mazdaspeed 3 this past weekend. The prototype shown was not ready for journalistic flogging, just some up-close inspection.

Starting with the Mazda 3 5-door hatchback, Mazda has lifted the excellent 2.3 liter, direct fuel injected, turbocharged 4 cylinder and 6-speed manual transmission from the Mazdaspeed 6 (see our road test [Here](#)). Power output is expected to be in the 250 horsepower range. With front-wheel-drive, the trick is getting the high-horsepower engine's power to the ground in a controllable manner. Mazda's solution to the torque steer gremlin is a combination of electronic engine controls linked to steering-angle sensing and a limited slip differential. This will be the key to the Mazdaspeed 3 being a true performance car or just a tire melting



machine like some other recent front-drive hot rods. As with the Mazdaspeed 6, the 3 boasts the power without screaming it with giant wings and scoops. We can hardly wait to give one a full test. For now, see www.mazdausa.com for information.

Places to Be!



If you are anywhere near Alexandria, Virginia this Sunday, make it a point to take in the 36th annual Toast to Alexandria. Visitors will enjoy some of the area's finest food and beverages in a garden party atmosphere. All of the proceeds go to benefit the Campagna Center. Again, the date is this Sunday, May 21 at Collingwood on the Potomac, from 4pm to 7pm. For more information, check out this link, <http://www.campagnacenter.org/events.htm>.

Another event sure to please the palette is the Greek Festival in Frederick, Maryland this weekend. Today through Sunday, May 21, visitors to the festival at Saints Peter and Paul Greek Orthodox Church will enjoy traditional Greek food along with demonstrations of traditional Greek life and entertainment. The festival runs from 11:30 am to 8 pm, see all the details at www.stspeterpaul.net.

Just a reminder that Cars & Places is helping out with a local classic car and hot rod show! It will take place on June 18, Father's Day at the Maryland Sheriff's Youth Ranch on Maryland MD-80 about 3 miles south of I-270. It is open to all vehicles, including motorcycles, hot rods, classics and import tuners. People's choice trophies will be awarded and there will be food and music. It will be a great time to share with Dad! Look for a complete schedule and directions coming on our website.

That's all for this week!

So until next time, enjoy your drive!

Rick Trawick

Publisher

Any comments or questions you may have are welcome. Please email them to info@carsandplaces.com. If you would like to see your event mentioned, send it to the same address.

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