

2007
NEW
CARS

SUZUKI

PREVIEW SX4

Suzuki returns to what Suzuki does best: Small.

BY AARON ROBINSON

As oil prices go, so do Suzuki's fortunes. The specialist in 660cc fuel-by-the-spoonful midget cars concluded the first six months of 2006 having outsold every automaker except mighty Toyota and Nissan in the Japanese home market. In September, Suzuki will try to spread a little micro-magic to America with the SX4 four-wheel-drive hatchback.

The five-door SX4, with a 143-hp, 2.0-liter inline-four and an expected base price of \$15,000, stabs Suzuki into the so-called B-segment of ultra-small boxes, wherein reside the Honda Fit, the Nissan Versa, and the Scion xB. The segment, which Suzuki says accounted for 276,000 units in 2004, is expected to swell to 420,000 this year and grow like a wildfire sprayed with \$3-per-gallon gasoline to perhaps a million by 2010, according to Gene Brown, vice-president of marketing for American Suzuki Motor Corporation.

With the SX4, "we think we've identified some so-called white space in the segment," says Brown. He means that the Suzuki is different. Standard four-wheel drive at this base price certainly is; you'll have to kick in another \$4000 to \$5000 to get it on a Dodge Caliber or Subaru Impreza wagon.

The SX4 uses an electric-solenoid-operated clutch pack to activate the rear axle. A console button locks it in four-wheel drive, selects an auto-engagement mode, or—and this is *really* different; no other AWD system offers it—locks it in two-wheel drive for fuel economy. Suzuki estimates mileage at 24 city and 29–30 highway, depending on whether it's the standard five-speed manual transmission or the (\$1000 option) four-speed automatic. Those numbers put the 2800-to-2950-pound SX4 near the bottom in fuel thrift for

the class, but Suzuki figures it's a fair trade for above-average horsepower and all-weather traction.

The SX4 replaces the Aerio SX small wagon (the Aerio sedan will remain until a sedan version of the SX4 arrives next year). The new SX4 hatchback opens to an interior with upgraded materials and improved fit. With a claimed 38 cubic feet behind the rear seats and 54 with the seats down, the high-roof SX4 is significantly larger indoors than all other B-segment cars, including the Caliber. Six airbags are standard, including side-impact and curtain bags, as are ABS and four-wheel disc brakes.

A short drive shows the SX4 to be accommodating even for backseaters and quieter than its buzzy predecessors. The engine spins easily to its 5800-rpm power peak, and the steering and the suspension step lively.

Another small patch of white space goes dark.

Vehicle type:	front-engine, 4-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 5-door wagon
Estimated base price:	\$15,000
Engine type:	DOHC 16-valve inline-4, aluminum block and head, port fuel injection
Displacement.....	122 cu in, 1995cc
Power (SAE net).....	143 bhp @ 5800 rpm
Torque (SAE net).....	136 lb-ft @ 3500 rpm
Transmissions.....	4-speed automatic, 5-speed manual
Wheelbase.....	98.4 in
Length/width/height.....	162.8/69.1/63.2 in
Curb weight.....	2800–2950 lb
Performance ratings (C/D test):	
Zero to 60 mph.....	9.0–10.0 sec
Standing ¼-mile.....	17.3–18.5 sec
Projected fuel economy (mfr's est):	
EPA city driving.....	24 mpg
EPA highway driving.....	29–30 mpg

Unchanged: Aerio, Forenza, Grand Vitara, Reno, Verona.

Dead: Aerio SX.

