

# Suzi comes out to play



According to Suzuki, life starts where the street ends. Their newly launched Grand Vitara and Jimny mean 4x4ing just got a whole lot more affordable. Dieter Losskarn took the Suzis to play in the rough.

Suzuki couldn't have wished

for a better event to coincide with the local launch of their new Suzuki 4x4s. Two women in a Grand Vitara recently became the first all-female team to cross the finishing line of the gruelling 7 200-kilometre 2008 Transsyberia Rally. Behind the wheel was a South African paramedic with no motorsport experience whatsoever, 26-year-old Melina Frey of Cape Town, and her German co-driver, Alexandra Hahn. It took them two weeks to drive from Moscow to the Mongolian capital of Ulan Bator.

The pair also finished second in the class for 4x4 vehicles with diesel engines of up to 3,0 litres – behind another Grand Vitara. Rally regulations allow only minor changes to the vehicles, which means they competed in near-standard trim. In the overall standings, the Suzi girls finished in 14th place. Only 23 of the original 34 starters finished the tough event.

With 26 of the 34 entrants opting for Porsche's mighty, specially equipped Cayenne S Transsyberia, the Suzuki's success is even more astounding.



*'As expected from such a short-wheel lightweight, the Jimny's off-road abilities are gobsmacking.'*

'It was exciting, thrilling, challenging and wonderful,' Melina said at the finish. 'Mongolia and its people are simply fantastic. I had a lot of fun driving the Grand Vitara.'

What makes Melina's achievement particularly impressive is her almost complete lack of experience. She had never competed in a rally like this before, although she is an off-road driving enthusiast.

'I tried to spend as much time as possible behind the wheel of the family 4x4 in the bush before leaving to compete in the event and I practised tackling difficult obstacles.'

Now 'ordinary' South Africans can do the same – and at a surprisingly affordable rate. In order to make their presence felt, Suzuki decided to significantly undercut the prices of their competitors without compromising on quality or specification levels.

As a result, the Swift and SX4 (soon to be available in 4x4 as well) launched in May are selling much better than predicted.

The attractive new Grand Vitara range consists of three models – two 2,4-litre four-cylinder derivatives and a 3,2-litre V6 auto flagship. It's a serious 4x4 with an advanced all-wheel drive system, which includes low-range and easy electronic dash switching between 4x4 modes. It has 200 mm of ground clearance (11 mm more than the new Jeep Cherokee) and short front and rear overhangs. Unfortunately, the V6 only comes with the auto box. The more economical, base manual four-cylinder for R269 900 may be the best choice.

Suzuki's second 4x4 offering is the iconic and cute Jimny, a direct descendant of the popular SJ410 and Samurai. With a heritage of four decades on its tiny back, it's currently the most affordable 4x4 in the country. At R149 500, it's cheaper than a Fiat Panda or Daihatsu Terios and the only off-roader in its class to offer low range. The fresh, contemporary styling still retains some of the old genes and



*It's a serious 4x4 with an advanced all-wheel drive system*

the friendly Jimny face is easily recognisable. Doubtless this vehicle will soon gather a cult following in South Africa, just like the Mini or Fiat 500. Mark my words, by this time next year, the Jimny will be one of South Africa's best-selling 4x4s.

It's proof that you don't have to spend half a million rand or more to have lots of fun on four wheels. But how are the two newcomers off the tar? What better place to find out

The new Grand Vitara in action at Klipbokkop near Villiersdorp (above) and during the tough Transsyberia Rally from Moscow (below).

than at Klipbokkop Mountain Resort ([www.klipbokkop.co.za](http://www.klipbokkop.co.za)) near Villiersdorp, which has some of the country's best 4x4 tracks.

As expected from such a short-wheel lightweight, the Jimny's off-road abilities are gobsmacking. In low range, it crawls up even the steepest loose gravel passes with ease. With its tiny turning circle, it cuts easily round narrow switchbacks without losing track. I would say it goes everywhere







any stock 4x4 available in the country right now can go. It's the perfect entry-level off-roader and, with several roof rack options, it can be a great holiday vehicle for young couples wanting to explore the dirt roads of Southern Africa, or for surfers driving down sandy roads to access their favourite waves.

The Grand Vitara with slightly deflated tyres does exceptionally well on sand, but also, thanks to the ESP, on fast gravel roads.

Under the watchful eye of off-road guru and Klipbokkop owner Gerhard Groenewald ('I'm a bit wor-

ried about those honeymoon tyres'), both vehicles tackled his tricky quarry course without misses, covering every steep ascent and descent.

He said most visiting 4x4s struggle around this section at least once or twice, but he gave the Suzis the thumbs-up. Gerhard was particularly impressed with the Grand Vitara's push-button hill-descent system (only available on the V6). The steepest slope can be accomplished without even touching the brakes. Both vehicles also have good wading abilities.

Fooling around on this big-boy's playground like this affected me and

Despite its small size and price, Suzuki's Jimny is a serious off-roader, with a practical interior and various roof-rack options.



*It's a great holiday vehicle for young couples wanting to explore the dirt roads of Southern Africa, or for surfers*



### The low-down

#### Suzuki Grand Vitara

Price: R269 900 for the 2,4 | manual; R282 900 for the 2,4 | auto; R323 900 for the 3,2 | V6 auto.  
 Engine: 2,4 | – 122 kW; 3,2 | V6 – 165 kW  
 Torque: 225 Nm@4000 rpm; 284 Nm@3500 rpm  
 0–100 km/h: 11,7/9,3 sec  
 Top speed: 180/200 km/h  
 Consumption/100 km: 8,9/10,5 litres  
 Fuel tank: 66 litres  
 Range: 740/630 km  
 Approach angle: 29°  
 Departure angle: 27°  
 Ground clearance: 200 mm  
 Weight: 1615/1713 kg  
 Standard equipment: Keyless operation, ABS, ESP, EBD. The V6 has leather upholstery, cruise control, a glass sunroof, xenon high-intensity discharge headlights and hill descent/ascent control. Free 4x4 driver training is included with every purchase of a Grand Vitara.

For more information: [www.suzuki.co.za](http://www.suzuki.co.za)

For a similar amount of money (R269 900 to R323 900), you could buy:

Nissan X-Trail (R328 400 to R388 990)  
 Jeep Cherokee (R299 900 to R369 900)  
 Toyota RAV4 (R292 700 to R352 000)

See the Transsyberia Grand Vitaras:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0q0XjsKb2k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0q0XjsKb2k)

### The low-down

#### Suzuki Jimny

Price: R149 900  
 Engine: 1,3 | – 63 kW/  
 0–100 km/h: 14,1 | sec  
 Top speed: 140 km/h  
 Torque: 110 Nm@4 100 rpm  
 Consumption/100 km: 7,2 litres  
 Fuel tank: 40 litres  
 Range: 550 km  
 Approach angle: 37°  
 Departure angle: 46°  
 Ground clearance: 190 mm  
 Weight: 1070 kg  
 Standard equipment: ABS, air-con, fog lamps, central door locking, power windows, power steering, power mirrors, radio/CD, dash-mounted 4x4 selection, low range, driver and passenger airbags, roof rails. Free 4x4 driver training is included with every purchase of a Jimny.  
 For more information: [www.suzuki.co.za](http://www.suzuki.co.za)

For a similar amount of money (R149 900), you could buy:

Fiat Panda 1,2 | Climbing 4x4 R157 000  
 Daihatsu Terios 1,5 | 4x4 R184 995

Watch some great Jimny offroad footage:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=qr8eWYKQHM&NR=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qr8eWYKQHM&NR=1)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=IL4moQXv\\_XI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IL4moQXv_XI)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUutVf\\_Zb3c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUutVf_Zb3c)



*The steepest slope can be accomplished without even touching the brakes*

I started getting crazy ideas. Why not have a South African Suzi team taking part in next year's Transsyberia Rally, driving both Grand Vitaras and Jimmys? Modified with snorkels for the numerous deep and sometimes treacherous river crossings, they'd need larger fuel tanks for better range and special racing seats for better side support. Jeez, wouldn't it be great taking on a Porsche Cayenne in a Jimny, while following in the footsteps of Genghis Khan? Imagine the faces of the Cayenne drivers! I'm confident a Jimny Khan would reach the finish line in Mongolia. Come on Suzuki, let's go for it! ■

**Next month:** We drive the most comfortable moms' taxi, a Mercedes R-class through Bavaria and go game-tracking in KwaZulu-Natal in a face-lifted ML.

## Wheels etc.



### E-Mobility in Berlin

The inventor of the automobile has done it again. Daimler, together with RWE, Germany's largest power supply company, has launched the world's most comprehensive joint venture for environmentally friendly electric cars. Daimler will provide more than 100 emission-free electric cars from the Mercedes-Benz and Smart ranges, while RWE will handle the development, installation and operation of the charging infrastructure, accounting for some 500 charging points in and around Berlin. The new generation of Smart ed (electric drive) and electric battery-driven vehicles from Mercedes-Benz will be part of Berlin's E-Mobility project. Production will start in 2010 and charging points will be installed at customers' homes, workplaces, in public parking areas and shopping centres. The accounting system will be as simple and convenient as using a mobile phone. Web [www.mercedes.co.za](http://www.mercedes.co.za).

### Cool Joule – South Africa's own electric car

An electric car made in South Africa will soon be a reality. Optimal Energy, a privately owned company based in Cape Town, has revealed plans to launch Africa's first all-electric vehicle. Appropriately named Joule, the zero-emission car is a six-seater MPV (multi-purpose vehicle). Designed by Optimal Energy in association with legendary South African-born automotive designer of Jaguar fame, Keith Helfet, the sleek Joule made its global debut at the Paris Motor Show in September. The battery range is about 200 kilometres, enough for 99 per cent of city driving. Using a 220-volt outlet, the re-charging time is around seven hours (overnight in Eskom off-peak time). Production is scheduled to start in 2010, with a capacity of about 50 000 units a year. The price will be similar to same-size competitors with petrol or diesel engines. Imagine a peaceful city with emission- and noise-free traffic flow, occasionally interspersed with the screams of surprised pedestrians, who didn't hear the silent electric cars approaching! Web [www.optimalenergy.co.za](http://www.optimalenergy.co.za).



### New moms' taxi

Since the first-generation Chrysler Voyager was launched 25 years ago, 12-million have been sold worldwide. Now the inventor of the multivan (MPV) has launched the fifth generation. The 2009 Voyager is bolder, more muscular and more refined than its predecessors. A first is the six-speed auto transmission, available with both the 3,8-litre V6 petrol and the 2,8-litre turbo diesel engines. New 'swivel 'n go' seating offers second-row seats that turn 180 degrees to face the third row, with a removable table between the rows. Standard equipment in the Grand Voyager is the 'stow 'n go' seating and storage system, which offers both second- and third-row seats that fold into the floor. It retails from R329 900 to R439 000. Web [www.chrysler.co.za](http://www.chrysler.co.za) for more details.

## Stuck

During our trip in Moremi, Botswana, the Isuzu got stuck after the manifold came loose just after entering the water. This resulted in power loss from the turbo and the water started to stream into the vehicle. My sister (on the roof) crept out of the window like a meerkat from its hole to avoid getting wet. My brother-in-law and his friend tried to rescue what was important. My Landcruiser 80 had to work real hard to pull the Isuzu to dry land. It looked like the Vic Falls when they opened the doors!

*Wim Botha, Krugersdorp.*

If you have photographs of a 4x4 getting stuck, e-mail them to [wheels@getaway.co.za](mailto:wheels@getaway.co.za) or post them to Getaway Wheels, PO Box 180, Howard Place, 7450 Cape Town. You could win a Nissan Securetech recovery kit worth R1 500, comprising a recovery kit bag, nine-metre kinetic energy snatch recovery strap, five-metre pull/winch extension recovery strap, two alloy recovery bow shackles, leather gloves, key ring and Offroad Tactix instruction DVD and manual. ■



