

Suburban Observer & Eccentric Automotive Showcase

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CARreport



Suzuki Samurai:

Fun on the cheap

By Anne Fracassa
Avanti NewsFeatures

Unique, bare-bones, four-wheel-drive and fun to drive. And it has an option someone like me would be stupid not to have: A rugged, powerful, 1,500-pound capacity, front-bumper-mounted winch with a 25-foot cable.

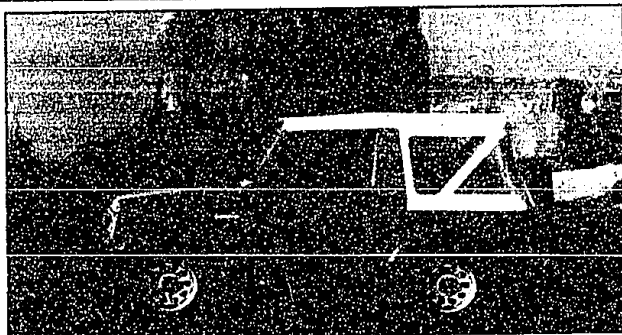
Surely the winch could get me out of any stuck-in-the-mud off-roading adventure while I'm dressed in my Sunday best, right?

The new Suzuki Samurai never provides a dull moment in everyday driving experiences. Nearing a decade on U.S. soil, the Samurai isn't cheap on performance, yet is cheap with its \$10,000-range sticker price. Find a better price for a sport utility 4x4 and you should buy it.

The Samurai has a 1.3 liter, electronically fuel-injected, four-cylinder inline, four-stroke cycle, water-cooled, overhead cam engine that promises a top 66 horsepower at 6000 rpm.

A bit of a problem with acceleration in rush-hour highway situations, but tooling around the city, the Samurai takes care of itself.

It isn't usually the first vehicle away from the light, but keep in mind that it gets 28 mpg in the city, 29 mpg on the



ROAD TEST
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highway. That means for a little over \$30, you're getting 300 or so miles on a tank of gas.

Quite a value and a terrific bargain for any four-wheel-drive enthusiast.

Coupled with a five-speed manual transmission, the Samurai behaves nicely when shifting. The long-throw is not that easy to get used to, but by the second or third day, shifting will become second nature. Long-throw shifts can sometimes be a pain; this one isn't.

Suzuki says in its press

material that its new leaf-spring suspension on the Samurai provides "a comfortable, yet sturdy ride." Comfortable? No. Sturdy? Well, if you enjoy feeling every pebble in the roadway, this baby's for you.

But isn't that what a sport utility is all about? The ride's rough. But rough is what you expect from an SUV, right?

Instrumentation is easy to read and simple to understand. All controls, from heating/cooling to stereo radio, are easy to reach and within grasp of the steering wheel.

Standard equipment includes the deluxe canvas top, Halogen headlamps, dual sport mirrors, tripmeter, two-speed intermittent windshield wipers and four-wheel-drive indicator lamp.

The Samurai tested had a removable canvas top. I tried to remove it. It proved to be more trouble than it was worth. On the freeway, the top

flapped wildly in the wind — even all sealed up — and I could barely hear the stereo — even at full zip.

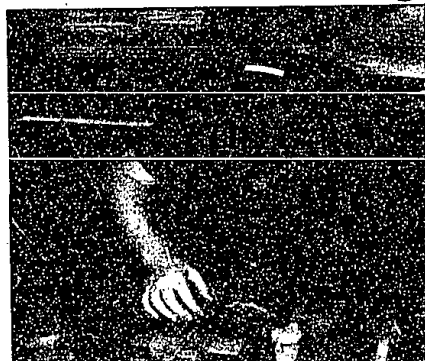
The best part of the Samurai is outfitting it for your personal needs. Here are a few of the accessories available: Chrome wheels, front bra/mask, chrome front guards, automatic free wheel hubs, off road lamps, tailgate security box, fog lamps, surf/sailboard carrier, ski carrier, luggage rack, hatchback removable hardtop, bikini top and boot, tonneau cover, altimeter/inclinometer, a host of stereo systems and plush mats.

All in all, if you're looking for a great value in a small sport utility vehicle, the Samurai is the one for you.

But if you can afford a higher-priced 4x4, you'd be disappointed if you opted for this one.

Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti NewsFeatures.

Heed Hot Tips For Cold-Weather Driving



(NAPS)—Is your vehicle ready for winter? Take it to a professional mechanic or take a few minutes to look it over to make sure, suggests Shell Motorist Club (SMC). Here's what SMC recommends.

- Check the battery for loose cables and light-colored terminal corrosion.
- Replenish oil, antifreeze, windshield wiper solvent, power steering and brake fluids as necessary.
- Replace windshield wiper blades if they don't clean properly.

- Check tires for proper inflation and tread.
- Inspect lights and turn signals.
- Join an automobile club. Members have peace of mind knowing that the cost of tows or road service calls is covered in their membership dues.

For more information on Shell Motorist Club membership, write P.O. Box 60199, Chicago, IL 60660, or call 1-800-852-0555.

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If you'd like to see a particular model tested or if you have a car question, send Anne Fracassa a message at AVANTI 1054, Avanti's America Online mailbox... Or comment through the Internet at AVANTI1054@aol.com

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