

The Suzuki Swift might be meant for city driving, but that doesn't mean it's not capable of taking on longer trips. In fact, you might be pleasantly surprised by just how comfortable and capable it can be on an extended journey



Photographs: Marc Bow

# Pushing [the limits]



South Africa is an interesting and unique country. Besides our shocking crime statistics and unmatched levels of corruption, we also have a somewhat different phenomenon on our roads. And no, we don't mean potholes.

The thing is, if you nip down to the airport right now and nose around in the car park, you are likely to find all manner of expensive, continent-conquering cars such as the BMW X5, Mercedes-Benz S-class and Audi Q7. Out on the open road, however, you'll probably find small cars like the Toyota Yaris or Volkswagen Polo.

Why is this?

Well, if you can afford a big, continental cruiser, you can also afford to fly. While ironically, if you can't afford to fly, you more than likely can't afford a big car either. So South Africans tend to drive their little cars way beyond their design parameters. Which is exactly why two South Africans decided to see just how far one can push the limits of a small car, in this case, the latest version of Suzuki's Swift.

Looking at the map, however, it is clear that South Africa just doesn't have enough road to properly do this test. From Cape Town to Beit Bridge, for instance, is only 2 000 kilometres – a pittance, compared to something

like crossing Australia.

Which explains why Marc Bow and I found ourselves in Perth not that long ago, getting ready to pilot a Swift GL across the continent, all the way to Cairns – a total distance of just under 7 000 kilometres. But to make things interesting, we decided to really push the limit by completing the trip in just six days, averaging more than 1 100 kilometres every day. This is how it played out.

"Don't drive in the dark," was the dire warning from the salesman who handed over the keys to a brand-new Swift GL at the dealership in Perth. "Great," I thought, "this time of year Oz gets about 10 hours of daylight and we'll be on the road for at least 13 each day. So there goes that idea!"

The reasons for his warning were many and they all involved the animal kingdom. Australia's rural roads are littered with kangaroos that will cripple your car if you hit one, wombats that will rip a wheel right off if you hit them, camels and cattle. So, driving in the dark is a no-no.

Two hours before dawn on the first day, we left Perth. Lights on bright all the way, we clawed our way aching slowly away from Perth, petrified of ending our journey just hours after setting out by defying the best advice we got prior to leaving. But the Swift's headlights are quite good and we never saw any animals. Or rather, we didn't see any live ones, but the scores of dead kangaroos on either side of the road did fill us with trepidation.

By sunrise we had settled into our little big car. Anybody who has spent any time driving the latest Swift will know that the tiny machine is carved from a block of solid granite. It feels much bigger and substantial than it is and it handles more like a much bigger car than a dinky toy. And with only two people on board, we never felt squashed either.

From Perth our route took us eastward to the bustling metropolis of Cocklebidy – population eight. Unfortunately, the time zone changed along the way, costing us 45 minutes of sunlight, so we ended up driving another couple of hours in

the dark. Never before had we been so happy to see a cheap motel and eat horrible food. The night flashed by and three hours before sunrise, we were back in the Swift.

The little car's equipment levels never ceased to amaze us, with air-conditioning and electric windows, power steering and even an iPod socket all as standard on the GL model in Australia. The one thing that we lacked, however, was cruise control, which would've come in extremely handy the next day.

We had to cross Australia's Nullabor Plain, which seems to be a big thing to them. To us, it looked just like the Karoo in places and not scary at all. Even so, it had one stretch of highway that ran straight as an arrow for 146 kilometres. And the speed limit is 110 km/h.

Next stop was Port Augusta, on the South Coast of Oz, followed by a crazy dash up the Stuart Highway to Ayres Rock. This highway has a speed limit of 130 km/h, which suited us much better. It did, however, play a large part in bringing our overall average fuel consumption to 6,4 litres/100 km for the entire journey. It would've been close to six litres/100 km if we hadn't stretched Swift's legs a bit on the Stuart Highway.

Ayres Rock was cool, but Alice Springs was disappointing. Next up was Tennant Creek, which didn't have much to see either, followed by Julia Creek and finally Cairns. We'd gone from the West Coast to the East Coast in a car designed mainly for city driving. We covered just short of 7 000 kilometres, used just over 1 000 litres of fuel and proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that small cars are only small if they aren't a Suzuki Swift.

As a matter of fact, the only time our Swift felt small was when we went past some of Australia's massive road trains. But even then, we felt like a Jack Russell: tiny, but powerful. It was an adventure of a lifetime and while a bigger vehicle may have given us a different experience, we didn't lack a thing in the Swift. Except, of course, for cruise control.

-by Waldo van der Waal

