

Shifting Gears

[Sliding Along in a Suzuki](#)

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By Roger Witherspoon

It was the kind of rainstorm that makes the TV weather folks look sternly into the camera and tell motorists to stay home.

The wind was rushing past 20 miles an hour and the rain slashed sideways in long blinding sheets as if continuously hurled from celestial buckets straight into the windshield. Visibility alternated with the blink of an eye between a second of clarity as the windshield wiper swooshed by followed a second later by another blinding bucket of rain.

In these conditions, the highway coursing along the Palisades some 400 feet above the Hudson River held a rolling sheet of water which, in unpredictable places, got suddenly deeper as a nearby stream rumbled over its embankment and gurgled down the

pavement.

With some cars, conditions like these turn a leisurely drive into a challenging, motorized version of Slip-n-Slide – but without the laughter normally accompanying the game. On this occasion, however, I was rolling down the Palisades waterway in the low end edition of Suzuki's Kizashi Sport, a \$23,000, mid-sized sedan with all wheel drive that is designed to take the work out of driving. It is so stable, that it also took the worry out of the weather.

So there was nothing to do but slip a flash drive into the USB port, tune to Spencer Rich, crank up the base through the seven, surround sound speakers, and sing loudly off key to his signature tune *Till You come Back to Me*. All things considered, it was a great trip home, flooded mountain highways and all.



If you're looking for a small sedan, the Kizashi has a few things going for it. To begin with, Suzuki's designer gave it a long, steep, sloping front windshield fading into a longer, steeper, sloping hood ending in a narrow grill which was intended to look aggressive but bears more of a resemblance to a smile. The slope gives it a sleek silhouette that – in addition to dodging raindrops – looks good. While this car sits at the low end of the Suzuki line, it does not look cheap or appear as an after-thought.

It features 18-inch alloy wheels and looks sportier than it actually is. Underneath that long hood is a 2.4 liter, four-cylinder engine chugging out only 180 horsepower and 170 pound/feet of torque. Drag racing, therefore, is not what this car is about. But it is a light car, so there is plenty of horsepower to let you roll into triple digits if you're anxious to lose your license. And if you drive it in manual mode the Kizashi can feel like a more powerful sports machine.

But this is actually intended as a young family car and, in that regard, has a few things to offer. Its trunk is large enough to store a month's worth of luggage and, if you need more, there is a ski slot through to the rear section, or you can fold the rear seats flat. In that mode, it carries as much as a small crossover.



There are a few thoughtful touches, such as a deep slot in the dash on the left side of the telescoping steering wheel which easily holds a cell phone. The side pockets on the doors are easy to reach into with the doors closed, and are wide enough to hold a water bottle in an accessible slot.

On the downside, Suzuki offers few amenities for \$23,000. There is an excellent sound system, but there is only AM/FM radio. There is no satellite radio, no navigation system, no Bluetooth, and the CD player holds only one disc. There is a slot for a USB port, but leave the iPod and MP3 player at home. And while the sight lines are excellent, there is no sun roof.

The front seats are wide, thickly padded, and comfortable. The driver's seat is power adjustable while the passenger's seat is manually operated. But the seats are cloth covered and can't be heated. The rear seats are comfortable, but those who dwell over the six-foot range might have trouble with leg room. The lack of amenities may make it difficult for the Kizashi to compete with touring technology toy like the Ford Fiesta or Volkswagen Jetta.

All things considered, the Kizashi is a sedan that earns a second look and, perhaps, a permanent ride home.



2011 Suzuki Kizashi

MSRP: **\$23,554**

EPA Mileage: **22 MPG City** **29 MPG Highway**

Performance / Safety:

2.4-Liter, 4-cylinder engine producing 180 horsepower and 170 pound/feet of torque; all wheel drive; automatic transmission; 4-wheel independent suspension; 4-wheel disc brakes; traction and stability control; 18-inch alloy wheels; dual front facing and side seat mounted airbags; rear seat side and head curtain airbags.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/FM radio; single disc CD and USB port; powered front drivers' seat; tilt and telescoping steering wheel; fold flat rear seats with 60/40 split.