

Focus shifts to Swift

Redesigned Suzuki Swift to emerge soon, with new SX4 and Splash to follow

By MARTON PETTENDY

HAVING just launched its all-new flagship and first mid-size sedan, the Kizashi, Suzuki will now turn its global attention to the next-generation version of one of its smallest models – the Swift.

By far the most popular Suzuki sold in Australia, the current Swift will not be replaced here until the first quarter of 2011, but GoAuto has learned the redesigned model will emerge well before its official premiere at the Paris motor show in September.

Suzuki Motor Corporation's marketing chief for the Oceania, America and South Africa regions, Masaki Kato, told GoAuto the new Swift will be revealed at a function at the Hungarian factory that produces the current model for Europe, by July.

We understand it will then be launched to the European press in August, before making its formal public debut in Paris the following month.

The current fifth-generation Swift has been Suzuki's leading light this year, helping the Australian subsidiary to a 28.5 per cent sales lift so far this year by being more than 18 per cent more popular in 2010. It is currently Australia's fifth best selling light car behind the Hyundai Getz, Toyota Yaris,



Current Swift Sport

Holden Barina and Mazda2.

A similar experience globally means the next-generation Swift will be a case of "evolution rather than revolution", according to Suzuki Australia general manager Tony Devers.

European spy shots of the next-gen Swift in testing show Suzuki's B-segment star will adopt the Kizashi's edgier new corporate face without losing its trademark five-door shape or its oversized, back-swept headlights.

Australia's Swift should continue to be offered with a 1.5-litre engine driving the front wheels, though an all-wheel drive version and engines ranging between 1.2 and 1.6 litres are already available in some overseas markets.

A plug-in hybrid version of the current Swift received type approval from the Japanese government on May 12, and Suzuki says it will ship an unspecified number to dealers in Japan for field testing "in order to collect performance data corresponding to regional traffic conditions and information on service issues".

Suzuki's new Swift Plug-in Hybrid five-seater matches a 660cc petrol engine with a 55kW/180Nm AC synchronous electric motor and a 2.66kWh lithium-ion battery to deliver an EV-only driving range of 15km.

The news lends weight to reports that suggest the next Swift, which has been earmarked for release in the US by the end of this year, will be publicly available with a hybrid drive system – most likely only for Europe, Japan and the US, where Suzuki sales slumped from more than 100,000 to 40,000 last year.

No Suzukis are currently built in the US,

following the split between Suzuki and General Motors and the demise of the XL-7 SUV, which Mr Kato said would not be replaced.

But Suzuki's regional marketing chief said the Kizashi was the most likely model to be built in North America and that, in addition to Suzuki's six production plants in Japan as well as in India, Pakistan, Indonesia and Hungary, one of two Chinese Suzuki factories could produce a range of models for potential Australian consumption, including the Kizashi, within three years.

Mr Kato said the first product to emerge from Suzuki's new Thailand factory, which will come online in 2012, will be the next-generation SX4.

Apart from Suzuki's \$20,000-plus small car, however, the Swift and Splash could also eventually be manufactured in Thailand, which has a free-trade agreement with Australia, potentially allowing all models built there to offer better value here.

India's Suzuki Maruti, which produces the Alto city-car, already has an annual production capacity of one million vehicles, and a new plant will soon increase that by 300,000 cars.

In addition to the sub-\$13,000 Alto, however, managing director Tak Hayasaki has always said Suzuki Australia is determined to release the Splash locally, positioned between the Alto and Swift, which currently opens at \$16,290.

Mr Kato said last week's Kizashi launch and a rash of redesigned small, light and sub-light models would continue the global sales momentum Suzuki has maintained despite the world financial crisis.

"Launching the new Kizashi at this time is exciting because we all look at the period from the worldwide financial crisis that affected all of us," he said. "Globally we saw China overtake the US as the world's largest automotive market, with American sales down more than 20 per cent."

enVision
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

You can take your dealership to higher levels with Autoline

- Drive revenue
- Save time
- Use 'best practice' processes
- Boost productivity
- Reduce costs
- Increase customer satisfaction
- Enhance business management
- Improve profitability

All from a single, highly developed, integrated solution.

Autoline

Envision IT – authorised distributors of Autoline the world's most successful dealer management system.

T | (03) 9886 7322
E | autoline@envisionit.com.au
www.envisionit.com.au/autoline



Splash

FULL STORY: [CLICK HERE](#)
Alto sales to double – page 21