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Cult of Personality

Suzuki calls the SV650 a “V-twin fun machine.” After flogging both the plain and S versions for a day, we can’t argue with that.

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IT'S HARD TO DEFINE WHAT ACTU-ally gives a particular motorcycle cult-like status, but Suzuki's SV650 definitely falls into that category. Even American Suzuki officials are baffled by the bike's success, freely admitting at the revised 2003 SV's press introduction that, when the little V-twin was introduced in 1999, they weren't quite sure what to do with it. And updating a cult bike is tricky business—how do you add your new technology and a fresh look without taking away what gave the original its appeal? Here's how:

PARTS-BIN MAKEOVER

Just as the original SV650 borrowed from the TL1000S, the new SV is a ringer for the new SV1000, with that bike's angular styling

and aluminum trellis frame. Both faired (S) and non-faired versions of the 650 are available, with the S-model sprouting a frame-mounted quarter fairing, clip-ons to replace the standard bike's tubular handlebar and more rearset footpegs along with other detail changes.

In addition to new styling, the little SV's skeleton is updated, utilizing a combination of a sand-cast steering head, high-vacuum-mold die-cast main spars and a die-cast pivot section that represents a five percent increase in rigidity over the original chassis. The front end is essentially unchanged, sporting a conventional 41mm damping-rod fork and dual discs with two-pot calipers. The rear end gets some tweaks through a single-piston Nissin caliper (replacing the previous Tokico two-piston unit) and a new swingarm, shock and linkage that results in 30 percent more wheel travel.

The biggest update on the 650cc V-twin mill is the addition of Suzuki's dual-throttle-

valve fuel injection, a setup similar to that used on the GSX-Rs and SV1000. Also, on the intake side, the airbox volume has been increased from 5.8 liters to 8.5 liters. On the exhaust side, muffler capacity is up from 5.2 liters to 6.5 liters. Inside the engine, hotter cams have more lift and duration, and the connecting rods are thinner and lighter. Keeping everything in check is a new engine control module with a 16-bit CPU that gets its cue from a 22-pole crank position sensor (up from four poles for more accuracy).

ENOUGH! JUST RIDE IT!

Sling a leg over the S-model and it's apparent that, while the seat is low and the riding position compact, the new SV is not as svelte as its predecessor. Park the 650 and 1000 beside each other and you'll see why: whereas the old SV was a $\frac{7}{8}$ scale TL, the new bike shares its fairing, tank, seat and tailsection—and the resultant size—with its big brother.

Ride away, however, and the sensations



The old SV's carburetors are replaced with Suzuki's SDTV injection setup with 39mm throttle bodies, which—like the GSX-Rs and SV1000—incorporate secondary throttle valves controlled electronically.

are classic SV650. The bike is light and flickable, the engine peppy and rev-happy. Suzuki's press material shows a very slight increase in midrange and a moderate boost in top end, but the engine runs much more smoothly than previously, as most of the old bike's lurchy off/on throttle response is absent and the mill feels crisper on partial throttle throughout the range. One disappointing thing about the new bike is the exhaust note—the bigger muffler mutes the delightful V-twin rumble on trailing throttle that gave the old SV a big-bike sound.

As you would expect, the unfaired, standard SV puts you in the wind more than the faired S-version, and its upright riding position is a bit easier on your back. It's not that the S is uncomfortable, but its pegs are on the high side and there's a fair reach to the clip-ons. The standard model, with its tubular bar and lowered footpegs, has lighter steering, but there is little difference in steering quickness—both SVs are light



In addition to the obvious differences between the S and non-S models, the unfaired SV has a slightly longer swingarm and wheelbase, footpegs that are lower and further forward, one-tooth-shorter final gearing and a hair more trail thanks to triple clamps with 1.5mm less offset. Note the new oil cooler on both versions.



The SV650's gauge package is shared with the 1000, as are the new push-to-pass and hazard light switches.

enough that even the S's narrow clip-ons give plenty of leverage over the front end. On tight roads, the unfaired bike seems better suited to a point-and-shoot riding style, whereas the faired bike prefers to be ridden with more classic, arcing lines.

On smooth pavement, the new SV is slightly more composed than its predecessor, partially due to the stiffer frame but more likely thanks to the Dunlop D220s mounted for this year. Yes, they're sport-touring tires, but they provide ample feedback and enough stick for the 650's chassis. It's when the road gets rough that things come unglued; while the rear end is no cause for concern, the damping-rod fork can't cope with bumpy pavement, so you'll have to back things down a notch.

Romp up a canyon road on the SV and you'll quickly learn to keep the engine spinning between the 7000 and 9000-rpm markings on the new tach. Much higher (redline is 11,000 rpm) and excessive engine braking will scrub off precious speed in mid-corner, and getting on the gas from a closed throttle requires a careful hand. Better, then, to use the crisp throttle response and relatively beefy midrange to conserve momentum and avoid a pile of gear changing. There are not many bikes that you can use full throttle with lots of revs together with any regularity (especially to avoid the local constabulary), but on the SV it's almost necessary in order to make time. And that's what makes riding the SV so much fun—you can flog the

SUZUKI SV650/SV650S

MSRP \$5899/\$6299

ENGINE

Type: Liquid-cooled, four-stroke, 90-degree V-twin
 Displacement: 645cc
 Bore x stroke: 81.0 x 62.6mm
 Compression ratio: 11.5:1
 Carburation: Mikuni fuel injection, 39mm throttle bodies
 Transmission: 6-speed

CHASSIS

Front tire: 120/60ZR-17 Dunlop D220FST L
 Rear tire: 160/60ZR-17 Dunlop D220ST L
 Rake/trail: 25.0 degrees/4.0 in. (102mm)/
 25.0 degrees/3.9 in. (100mm)
 Wheelbase: 56.7 in. (1440mm)/
 56.3 in. (1430mm)
 Seat height: 31.5 in. (800mm)
 Fuel capacity: 4.7 gal. (17L)
 Claimed dry weight: 368 lb. (167kg)/
 377 lb. (171kg)

little motor for all it's worth without breaking any laws.

The chassis and motor updates have definitely added some performance to the SV package, and the bike remains true to its "V-twin fun machine" concept. We're a tiny bit let down by the parts-sharing with the SV1000, as the resulting size makes the 650 less attractive to new or petite riders, but we can also understand that's what makes the bike such a bargain. As a platform for those who like to tinker, the little SV is tough to beat—it's easily and cheaply modified to account for a new rider's increasing skills. And that is a big part of what has made—and will continue to make—the SV650 such a hit.

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