



As a new four-wheel-drive vehicle the Suzuki offers a lot of fun for a small cost.

Road Test **suzuki brute 4**

Off road machines come in two classes: four wheel drive and two-wheel-drive buggies. Suzuki's Brute IV fits into the first of these classes but to compare it with what four wheelers generally regard as a four-wheel-drive machine is like comparing a Piper Cub with a jet airliner. Yet, there are a lot of people who prefer Piper Cubs so it stands to reason that a lot of off road enthusiasts might like the Brute.

Our first impression was: "Oh, Boy! That's a little one."

A check of specifications proved that this was no idle exclamation. Overall height is 64.8 inches at the windshield and length is 117.9 inches. With a width of 51 inches, the Suzuki can be driven through many double doors.

The powerplant is an air cooled, two cylinder, two cycle, displacing 360 cc, that's about 22 cubic inches. The horsepower is about what you would imagine, 32 horsepower although a slightly larger engine is in the works.

The engine burns an oil-gas mixture. It is not necessary to mix the oil with each tank of gas, this is done automatically from a plastic tank under the hood. On the dash is a warning light which works in two stages. When the center light is lit, there is plenty of oil, when the outer ring is also lit, it indicates that the oil supply is low.

The first thing a person must learn about driving the Suzuki is how to start it. The engine has an electric primer which squirts gas directly into the pistons for starting purposes. If the throttle is pumped it will flood the engine every time. Just a simple twist of the switch with no priming and it fires within the first half dozen revolutions.

The second thing to remember is that it takes a while before the cylinder heads are warm enough to start operating at maximum efficiency. During the test this proved to be a ride of about five minutes generally.

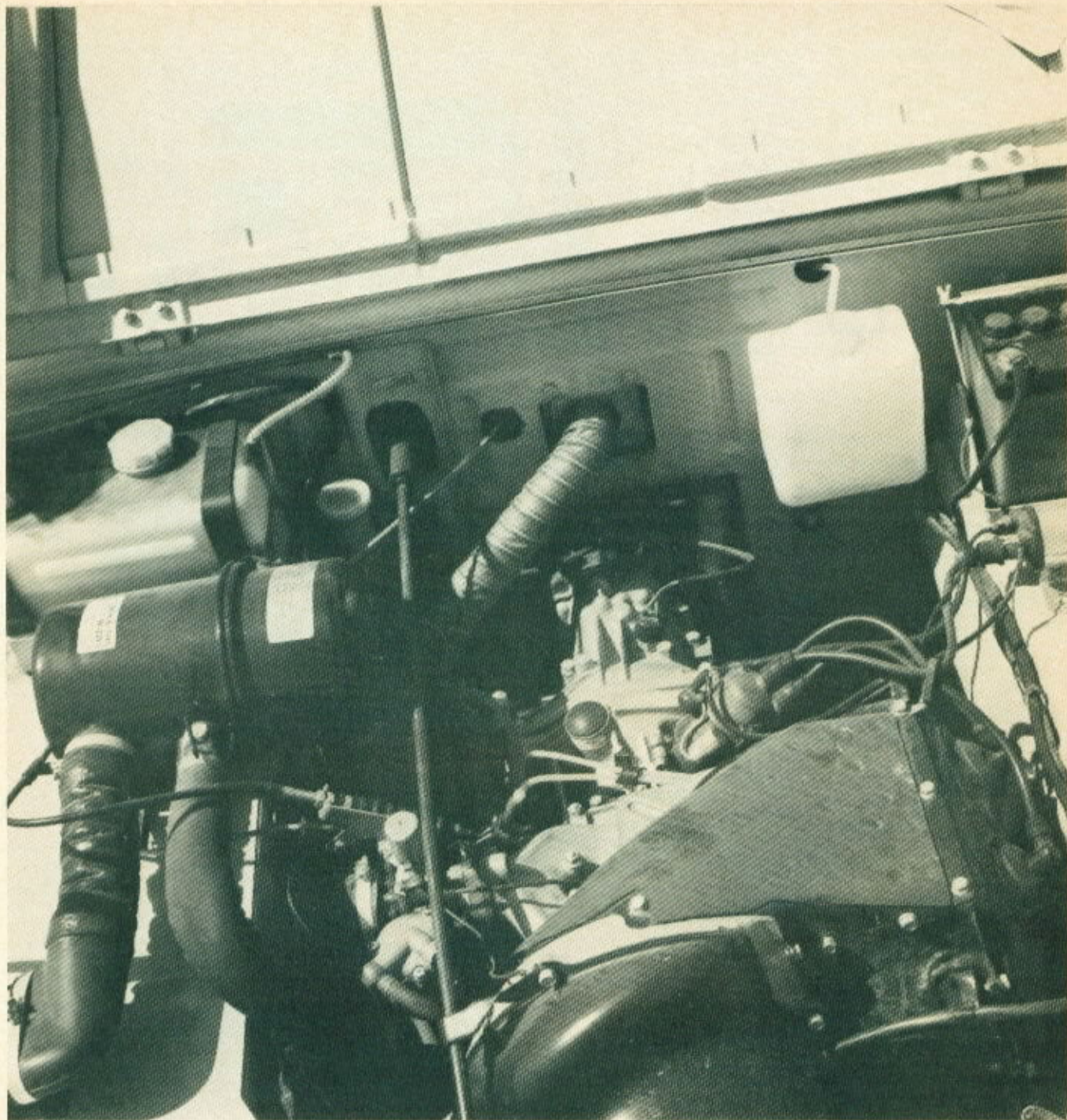
Since we were going to test the Suzuki on the sand, the dealer who prepared the Brute IV came up with the greatest example of overkill in the history of driving. These were a set of oversized sand tires which are generally found on a regular 4wd bobtail. As the Suzuki weighs only 1350 pounds unloaded, the flotation factor had to be somewhere in the neighborhood of three pounds gpsi. Had we bothered to let the air out of the tires to increase the footprint, we probably could have gone below two pounds gpsi and driven on top of snow banks.

As it was, we loaded the Brute with four persons, two were children so



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Displacing 360 cc, the Suzuki's engine is air cooled, has two cylinders and is a two cycle. The displacement works out to 2 cubic inches with 32 horsepower.

comfort was moderate, and headed for white sand. At first we were a little hesitant but these fears were groundless. Even carrying its near maximum 950 pound payload, the Brute wouldn't sink in the sand past the tread depth, about half an inch.

At first it was a tendency to drive in the lowest gears for a top speed of around ten miles an hour. Once the driver realized that there was no way to stick the Brute on level sand, higher

gears were used and soon the speeds on the sand reached 30 mph and better.

As a sand hill climber, the Suzuki runs out of power fast. Those it was able to conquer were only the short, not so steep dunes. On some, all the passengers got out while the driver took a run for it. Some moderate dunes were successfully negotiated this way.

The hill climbing ability of the Suzuki could have been greatly improved. By choosing either a 14- or

15-inch tire, the gearing would have been much more and flotation probably the same. This would put the rig on top of moderate dunes, but it would certainly be no terror in the sand country.

Our first experience with the transfer case was in the off road portion of the test and it deserves some comment here. It is unusual in that the gearing is 3.01- and 1.71-to-1, in place of the usual 1-to-1 final drive. This makes the final drive ratio 9.71-to-1.

With a low gear of 3.96, the final drive in high is just over 38-to-1 and in the low range (are you ready for this) 68 to one. Frankly, the Brute IV's little motorcycle engine needs these ratios. To operate efficiently, it must be wrapped up and with the low power the only way to avoid stalling is shifting down.

There are no hubs available for the Brute IV so the front differential is always turning. The transmission shifts easily and is fully synchronized so downshifting is no problem. The spacing between shift positions of second and fourth are quite close and it takes a bit of practice to avoid going into fourth when shifting out of low.

The transfer case is a dandy and is easily shifted. The pattern is straight for low 4wd, neutral and high 4wd. Then the stick breaks right and pushes up making certain that the machine is not accidentally left in four-wheel drive high for highway travel.

On the highway it takes a long time to get up to the top speeds. A maximum cruising range is from 50 to 55 mph although we once got it up to 60 mph but couldn't maintain it on level ground.

The steering was rack and pinion and very fast. Still it was positive enough so that there was no highway speed sway noticeable. With a turning circle radius of about 14 feet, the Brute has a maneuverability capability that is just short of amazing. It can almost turn in its own, under ten foot length.

One slight off road disadvantage stems from the 43-inch tread. It is impossible to follow anyone else's tracks and take advantage of an already prepared trail. This means that the Brute is always plowing its own way in the back country.

Inside, the Brute is comfortable but crowded. Bucket seats are standard and a bench seat for the rear is optional. The cargo capacity is two adults, two children, lunch in a sack and a camera case. Despite this, after a long day in the sand and a thirty mile drive home, the passengers were not tired from the ride. The Brute bounces a lot and transmits these shocks to the passengers but not to any great degree of discomfort in this type of driving. On hard surfaces it would be a different matter.

One of the major advantages of the Suzuki is its excellent economy. For continuous driving in four wheel drive in the sand our average was slightly over 20 mpg. Highway performance was 28 mpg. Although the engine has a good tolerance for regular it seemed to per-

form better on ethel.

The test vehicle was a right hand drive as were all early Brute IV's imported into this country. A conventional, left hand drive is now available so this problem is solved. But for those who have never driven a right hand drive, a day with the Suzuki can be a lot of fun.

First of all in highway driving the passenger gets a weird feeling. Approaching cars seem to be coming at him in direct attack and he has not the tools to defend himself. More than once, the passenger reached for the non-existent steering wheel or felt an urge to step on the brake. The driver adapts quickly and shifting with the left hand becomes a habit so fast that it is hard to believe. What is a little difficult

to accept is sitting on the right side staring down at the curb or ditch while tooling along at 50 miles per hour. In highway driving there is always the sense that something is wrong. Off the road, however, it is different and the driver soon gets the idea that he is on the right, in the right and everybody else is wrong.

Summing up the Suzuki as a new four-wheel-drive vehicle, it is definitely that. Something akin to the DKW's that were imported about ten years ago. They are not for the serious off roader who wants to conquer Devil's Slide. But for the fellow who like to putter in the back country and go around the more difficult obstacles, they will provide a lot of fun for small cost.

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