



GOOD SPORTS

THINKING OF SPLASHING OUT ON A SPORTY CAR?
HERE ARE THREE THAT SHOULD BE ON YOUR SHORT LIST.



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STARTERS SUZUKI SWIFT SPORT, SUBARU BRZ tS, BMW M140i



Suzuki Swift Sport



BMW M140i



Subaru BRZ tS



Precision handling in the Suzuki Swift Sport.

BEEER OR CHAMPAGNE budget, it doesn't matter – there's choice aplenty if you're seeking driving engagement, whether it be by way of a hot (or warm) hatch, sports sedan, desirable droptop or cool coupé.

To illustrate the fact, we're focusing the spotlight on a pair of the former – BMW's M140i and Suzuki Swift Sport – and Subaru's BRZ tS, which nicely represents the latter. Recently, all spent a week on the RACQ road test fleet. Here's how they shook down.

SUZUKI SWIFT SPORT

We've said of previous generations of Swift Sport that its competent chassis was crying out for more oomph. Now, with its new third-gen, Suzuki has delivered. The 1.4-litre Boosterjet turbo-charged, direct-injection four-cylinder unit that replaces the 1.6-litre normally-aspirated engine has a real elastic quality, pulling strongly even in a higher gear at lower road speed.

The power increase is just 3kW (103kW), but it's the boost in torque – some 70Nm – to 230Nm that really makes a difference. On acceleration, 0-100km/h comes up in a respectable 7.2 seconds; ADR combined cycle fuel figure (on 95 RON PULP) is 6.1 litres/100km. On test, we averaged 7.8.

Front and rear suspensions have been

THE OVERALL PACKAGE HAS BEEN DESIGNED TO REDUCE PITCH AND ENHANCE TORSIONAL RIGIDITY...

revised using Monroe-branded struts and shocks instead of the standard Swift's Hitachi Automotive Systems units; along with recalibrated stabiliser bars, the mounts of which get Teflon seats; new rear trailing arms; and new design wheel bearings and hubs.

The overall package has been designed to reduce pitch and enhance torsional rigidity, thereby promoting flatter cornering and sharper handling precision. Based on our road and track test, we would say 'mission accomplished'.

There's less body roll than we remember and a nice weighting and linearity to the steering. The six-speed manual gearshift is short and sweet and grip, even in the wet, is tenacious yet not

at the cost of overall litheness.

A comparative lack of weight also adds to the car's athletic ability, the newcomer tipping the scales at just 970kg (six-speed manual), some 90kg lighter than before. Based on Suzuki's new Heartect platform, the Swift Sport is stronger and more rigid, wider (+40mm), lower (-15mm) and has a broader track and longer wheelbase.

The ride on 17" alloys shod with sticky 195/45 R17 Continental rubber is firm (more obvious at low speeds), but not as hard-edged as some hot hatches. We would call it a good compromise. Under hard cornering, the sports seats support well.

Safety tech is extensive and includes lane departure warning and dual sensor brake support (Suzuki's forward collision warning and autonomous emergency braking system) as standard.

What's not to like? Road and wind noise can prove intrusive, rear passengers miss out on aircon vents and there's no spare wheel – just an inflator kit.

SUBARU BRZ TS

The tS is the new halo variant in Subaru's BRZ sports coupe range. Developed with substantial input from the brand's performance arm, Subaru Tecnica International (STI), the tS costs nearly \$6000 more than its base model BRZ six-speed manual sibling, and is some \$4400 dearer

than the mid-spec BRZ Premium. A six-speed auto adds \$2000 in each instance.

So, what do you get for the extra? In a nutshell, style and substance.

A host of visual enhancements includes exclusive front bumper, black rear spoiler and external mirrors and a mix of tS or STI logos sprinkled tastefully. Adding the 'starch' are Sachs suspension, Brembo brakes, STI coil springs and 18-inch alloys. At 1255kg, the tS weighs in 13kg up on the standard car.

Let it be said that the chassis dynamics uphold the BRZ's reputation as a driver's drive. The steering is well-weighted and communicative, and the body taut and near devoid of lateral roll. But the changes have largely dialled out the BRZ's ability to wag its tail, if you get my drift (pun intended).

The extra grip from the tS's bigger tyre and wheel package (215/40 R18 as

opposed to 215/45 R17 on the 'standard' variants) and aforementioned mechanical tweaks make the car feel more planted and – it must be said – less BRZ-like. The stiffer suspension contributes to a more assertive cornering stance, but the trade-off is a firmer, though not unliveable, ride. And, as with the other two cars in our conversation, tyre 'roar' pervades the cabin.

Not especially powerful or torquey (by performance car standards) at 152kW and 212Nm, the normally-aspirated 2.0-litre Boxer engine delivers its best well up in the rev range. It's no firebrand, and some might lament that there's been no increase in kW or Nm.

In terms of acceleration, 0-100km/h is accomplished in the mid-7s. On test, the tS returned 9.2 litres/100km, a commendable 0.6 above its ADR combined cycle figure on 98 RON PULP. With its short throws, the six-speed

manual gearbox is well matched, though shifting felt more abrasive than we remember of any other BRZ we've driven.

Compared with the two hatchbacks, the BRZ's interior is more cockpit-like (enthusiasts rejoice). The front sports seats, finished in Alcantara, provide plenty of lateral support, but not at the expense of comfort. In the back, there's token (very token) seating for two.

BMW M140i

Along with introducing the latest Life Cycle Impulse (LCI) updates to its 1 Series range, BMW has dropped the price of the halo M140i by some \$5000 to less than \$60,000.

Dress-ups include 18-inch light alloy road wheels in Jet Black and new iDrive6 app-style infotainment interface. Fitted with BMW's Professional Navigation System as standard, the M140i offers touch screen



Side view of the BMW 140i.



The deceptively sporty Swift.



17-inch alloys give a firm ride.



The BMW140i from behind.



Classic sport styling on the Subaru.



capability as seen in the all-new 5 Series.

Featuring a 3.0-litre turbocharged six-cylinder petrol engine bristling with 250kW and 500Nm driving through the rear wheels, the five-door M140i is offered with a choice of standard automatic (as tested) or (no cost option) six-speed manual transmission. In keeping with the M nomenclature, it comes with adaptive M suspension and M Sport brakes. Significantly, it is the only turbo six, rear-wheel-drive hot hatch on the Australian market.

Mechanically, the M140i remains unchanged – and so too the driving experience. This is a cracking car, with the ability to cover the 0-100km/h sprint in just 4.6 seconds. Think about it for a moment – 20 years ago, that was Ferrari F355 performance.

But the M140i's real strength is its consummate, real world capability. Coupled with BMW's smooth-shifting, linear eight-speed auto, the inline-six is a mighty tractable unit, being equally at home in the big city grind as it is cruising the motorway, dispatching a twisty back road or in full attack mode at a (race) track day. Even fuel consumption is reasonable for what it is. On test, we averaged 9.8 litres/100km, 2.7 above the ADR combined cycle number.

Typical of so many muscled-up Euro machines, the M140i rides and handles best on a smooth, hot mix surface. On coarse chip bitumen, the fat, run-flat rubber caused considerable tyre 'roar' and a skittish back end. Of course, BMW does form and function in addition to powerhouse performance. In the M140i, tick the boxes for BMW's ConnectedDrive suite of services, Navigation System Professional with 8.8-inch touch screen, DAB+ radio, harman/kardon loudspeaker system, extended automatic climate control and interior/exterior mirrors with anti-dazzle function.

Ditto Adaptive LED headlights with selective beam, Comfort Access System, Dakota leather upholstery, front sports seats with powered adjustment and memory function, Driving Assistant, rear view camera, front/rear park distance control and rain-sensing wipers.

COSTS + RATINGS

SUZUKI SWIFT SPORT



Price	\$24,990 [^]
ANCAP safety rating	★★★★★
Warranty	3yr/100,000km
Capped price servicing	\$239.20 avg per service (10 services over 5yr/100,000km)
Annual insurance costs	\$632.86 ^{^^}
Retained value	55% ^{^^^}

SUBARU BRZ TS



Price	\$39,894 [^]
ANCAP safety rating	★★★★★
Warranty	3yr/unlimited km
Capped price servicing	\$224.55 per service (4 services over 3yr/60,000km)
Annual insurance costs	\$921.98 ^{^^}
Retained value	51% ^{^^^}

BMW M140i



Price	\$59,990 [^]
ANCAP safety rating	N/A
Warranty	3yr/unlimited km
Capped price servicing	One-off advance payment from \$1395 (5yr/80,000km)
Annual insurance costs	\$1017.94 ^{^^} (+ \$400 high performance excess)
Retained value	59% ^{^^^}

[^] PRICES ARE MANUFACTURERS' LIST PRICES UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED AND DO NOT INCLUDE STATUTORY AND DELIVERY CHARGES. PRICES CORRECT AT TIME OF PRINTING.

^{^^} BASED ON AN RACQ INSURANCE COMPREHENSIVE POLICY FOR A 35-YEAR-OLD MALE, MAXIMUM NO CLAIM BONUS, VEHICLE FINANCIALLY UNENCUMBERED, AND \$650 EXCESS. MULTI POLICY AND RACQ MEMBER LOYALTY DISCOUNTS MAY APPLY. DISCOUNTS OF 2.5-15 PERCENT MAY BE AVAILABLE TO RACQ MEMBERS DEPENDING ON LENGTH OF MEMBERSHIP.

^{^^^} AFTER 3YR/60,000KM (GLASS'S GUIDE).

CONCLUSION

With price points of \$25k, \$40k and \$60k, our little exercise is in no-way meant to be a usual like-for-like, multi-car comparison. Rather, it's intended to show what your money can buy by way of value and driving engagement.

The BMW M140i is a dynamic drive and the \$5000 price reduction further enhances its ownership proposition.

With five-door practicality and all the performance most people could want, it fills the role of weekday workhorse and weekend warrior seamlessly.

The tS adds variety to Subaru's BRZ range, but we're not convinced it's better than its cheaper, more exploitive siblings. If you're serious about buying a BRZ, we would suggest test driving

the standard car and/or Premium variant back-to-back with the tS to see which one is for you.

And that leaves the little Suzuki. The title, really, says it all: Swift by name; Sport by nature. You could buy one without having to sell a kidney, yet enjoy years of fun and hassle-free driving. It best lives up to the 'bang for buck' and 'smiles per hour' tags. ■

REVIEW DEB ECCLESTON



ANOTHER SET OF EYES...

BACK WHEN I was at high school, my ambition was to be the next Jana Wendt (of *60 Minutes* fame, back in the day) and drive a red, MX5 sports car. Neither were realised. While I have no regrets, I was stoked to have a chance to experience the thrill of not one, but three sports cars, even if only for a moment.

Needless to say, given my youthful aspirations, it's clear how I define a 'sports' car. So I was surprised by the Suzuki Swift Sport which, if I'm completely honest, looks nothing like a sports car. Aside from the dual exhaust, it looks like a regular hatchback from the outside. Inside is more sporty, with figure-hugging seats and red stitching



on the centre console. A keyless ignition and reversing camera are nice touches and, while it doesn't look like a sports car, it certainly drives like one. If you're on a budget and looking for a stylish small car or an entry-level sports car, you can't go wrong.

I was similarly disappointed with the facade of the BMW M140i. This one looks like a regular hatch, but has sporty touches like the Swift. Don't be deceived, though, once you start the engine there's no mistaking it's a sports car. The throaty growl emanated will bring a smile to your

IF A PORSCHE AND AN ASTON MARTIN HAD A LOVE CHILD, THE RESULT WOULD BE THE SUBARU TS SPORT.

face and will no doubt earn some admiring glances from fellow drivers. The hatch shape has its advantages – there's plenty of space for passengers, so you can share the enjoyment of the ride.

The chassis is low-slung like a traditional sports car and it has all the comforts you'd expect from a high-end drive. The racing seats aren't forgiving – I'm not a large woman and they fit very snugly – but not enough to distract from the exceptional way this vehicle handles the road.

Like Goldilocks, but with sports cars, the first one was too 'hatchback', the second too 'wagon', but the third... oh the third. The Subaru TS Sport made all my dreams of driving a sports car come true.

If a Porsche and an Aston Martin had a love child, the result would be the Subaru TS Sport. It reeks of sex appeal with its sports styling, red seatbelts and throaty engine.

After turning on the ignition, I had to take a moment to enjoy the sound. I'm comfortable driving a manual transmission, but it took me a while to get used to the clutch being so close to the floor. Same with sitting so low to the ground, but once I'd overcome my nerves the adrenaline kicked in. The only downside is that while it provides for backseat passengers, it wouldn't realistically accommodate them comfortably.

My pick of the bunch? The oh-so-hot Subaru TS Sport. ■

