

Baleno is a shiny Suzuki star

 By [Henrie Geysers](#)

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The new Suzuki Baleno, which has been enthusiastically acclaimed and backed by strong sales across the globe, has arrived in South Africa and is destined to become a rapid attention-grabber in the brand's local line-up.



Management has set its sights on 80 sales a month which might seem a tad optimistic in the current downturn in new vehicle sales but such is the appeal of the Baleno that it might well clock up that figure or do even better.

It is a handsome wagon with a number of eye-catching features such as a sporty, sloping roofline, bulging wheel arches, slit-eyed headlights, black grille with the prominent S badge, sunken fog lights and attractive wheel trim.

Comfortable interior

The living quarters are refined, comfortable and richly endowed with many appealing nice-to-haves and it feels much roomier than its compact exterior proportions suggest. That's especially true of the rear bench seat, which is wide enough for three occupants, and offers ample shoulder room, with legroom to match.

In fact, the distance between the front seat backrest and the rear bench seat, also referred to as the tandem distance, is an impressive 805 mm. The rear bench seat is divided 60:40, allowing each section to be folded flat individually to create a

number of seating and cargo space configurations. The standard luggage space is 355 litres and with the rear seat folded flat this is extended to a generous 756 litres.

The instrument panel is designed for maximum visibility directly ahead of the driver and a 6,2-inch colour display for the infotainment system is located in the centre stack in the case of the range-topping GLX models.

There are three models to choose from, a GL, GLX manual and a GLX Auto and even the least expensive GL has a full-house of goodies which include dual front airbags, ABS, EBD and BAS, aircon, MP3, USB compatible CD player, Bluetooth with six speakers; steering mounted audio controls, multi-information display, front and rear accessory sockets. Extras on the GLX models add leather-covered steering wheel, alloy wheels, keyless entry, 6.2 touchscreen, rear park distance control, cruise control side and curtain airbags, auto climate control LED daytime running lights and more.



Driving pleasure

Fancy kit, comfort and looks aside, where the Baleno really shines is on the trot, where it really dishes up a delightful performance. All the models are powered by a 1.4iVVT engine that produces 68kW and 130Nm, which does not make any motoring aficionado's heart beat faster, but on this hatch it feels more than capable.

The two manual gearbox derivatives accelerate from 0-100 km/h in 10,9 seconds and are capable of clocking a top speed of 180 km/h. The automatic model boasts a 0-100 km/h sprint time of 11,6 seconds and has a top speed of 170 km/h. Suzuki claims an average fuel consumption of 5.1 litres/100 km for the manual and 5,4 litres/100 km for the automatic version.

At the media introduction I took the wheel of the least expensive GL and in the company of one of the other "oldies" with heavy miles as a motoring scribe, we covered some interesting areas in the more scenic parts of the Eastern Cape and we were equally impressed by the Suzuki's upmarket versatility.

Everything about this hatch feels good. The ride is solid, the steering feel is much better than the average in this segment, the cog-swopping process is slick and well attuned to power on demand and the living quarters are really well-insulated. In typical Suzuki fashion it clings to the tar with tenacity with hardly any body lean through the corners. To drive the Baleno is pure pleasure and undoubtedly amongst the best I have piloted in this class and price range.



It was quite unusual that not a single mutter about the Baleno was aired by any of the scribes during the after-drive beer-o'clock post mortem before dinner. We all seemed to have one common concern though: that not one of us could find even one nit-pickingly small thing to dislike about the Baleno – and that says it all about this top notch Suzuki.

The models and prices (which include a three-year/100,000 km warranty, as well as a four-year/60,000 km service plan) are:

Suzuki Baleno GL – R199,900

Suzuki Baleno GLX manual – R229,900

Suzuki Baleno GLX automatic – R244,900

ABOUT HENRIE GEYSER

Henrie Geyser joined the online publishing industry through iafrica.com, where he worked for five years as news editor and editor. He now freelances for a variety of print and online publications, on the subjects of cars, food, and travel, among others; and is a member of the South African Guild of Motoring Journalists. henrieg@iafrica.com

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