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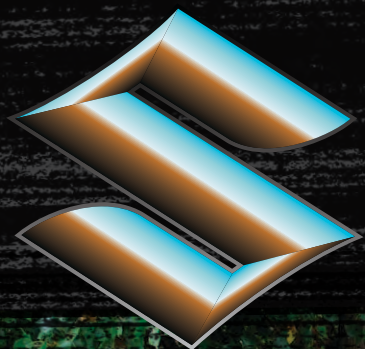


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SUZUKI V-STROM 650 ADVENTURE



The Suzuki 650 V-Strom (affectionately known as the “Wee”) has long been the odd man out amongst adventure motorcyclists. Although the model debuted a decade ago, this remarkably well made and rugged machine has barely ever been marketed by its maker.

The Wee may be one of the most reliable middle-weight bikes ever produced—almost an “air ‘n oil” only machine. Great on gas mileage (average 50–60 mpg), a big low-octane tank (5.3 US gallons for 2012, and 5.5 for previous years), and hefty frame, have made this dual-sport a sometimes ideal choice for adventurizing.

Sometimes ideal? When it comes to a truly “ideal” adventure bike, no matter which brand or model, they all seem to be a compromise of some kind. The Wee,

for example, barely cuts it for stand-up riding on the pegs. The wheelbase is a little too long, the handlebars need to be raised impossibly high, and the footpegs aren’t in the best position for controlled balance. So, depending upon your personal definition of “adventure riding,” if it involves a lot of dirt, sand and crud, the Wee may not be your top choice.

If, however, “adventure riding” means covering great distances in foreign lands on nothing too sandy, soggy or slippery, then the Wee’s remarkable reliability, middle-weight, fuel economy, mule-like carrying capabilities, and comfort, will win you over. And that’s the compromise I decided upon when I went looking for an RTW machine back in ‘07.

Prior to the arrival of the new *Adventure* model in 2012,

Above Two Wees, side-by-side. On the left, a 2008 D.I.Y. “Adventure” model. And the NEW 2012 Adventure. With the exception of a few additional options, the new design is a well thought-out package for quite a savings.

REVIEW

D.I.Y. ADVENTURIZING VS. THE NEW FACTORY ADVENTURE

by Paul H. Smith

the original *V-Stroms* were more ambiguously defined as “dual-sports,” requiring a little “adventurizing” in order to handle the loads and distance. For me, this process turned into an expensive, time-consuming, yet nevertheless interesting project. Thanks to companies like *Twisted Throttle*, *Touratech*, *Aerostich* and a few other adventure-minded shops who were dabbling in the *Suzuki* market, I was eventually able to outfit my '08 model. And with a little trial 'n error, along with several parts swaps and a few modifications of my own invention, I eventually built up a bike that I considered worthy of its intended journey.

So, what does all this have to do with the new *V-Strom 650 Adventure*? If you take a look at the accompanying comparison photos, you'll see my adventurized '08 *Wee* next to a 2012 *Adventure* model. The similarities of the adventurized components are remarkable. And that made it all the more interesting when I tested the new model against my own version to see how things stacked up.

So, after *Suzuki* tossed me the keys, the new *V* became my main bike for several weeks, where I logged a few thousand California miles, and got to know it pretty well. Southern California is an ideal environment to test adventure bikes in that our geography and micro climates mimic just about anywhere that's rideable on the planet. And, within a couple of days ride north, east or south (but not west!) you get about 90% of anything you'll find out there.

The new model ushers in a catalog of subtle mechanical as well as cosmetic refinements that improve upon the original design and actually make it more comfortable and a lot more fun to ride. Although few of the changes are radical, it's clear that *Suzuki* was wise in their decision to refine, rather than redesign. And remarkably, they left



“Suzuki has evolved and further perfected their Wee-Strom over the previous versions.”

Almost all of the road testing for this review was done under full load. Even in extremely windy conditions the new design seems to cut through it, with far less effort than the previous Wee design.



On the left is the '08 D.I.Y. “adventurized” Wee, on the right the new *Adventure* model. Note that the engines are basically the same, although there have been several subtle tweaks. Also, the 2012 no longer has an oil cooler.





Pablo Espinosa performed the off-road portion of our review. Although it could use a set of knobbies, the big issue is the lack of an ABS kill switch. But, there's a cure, check out the *V-Strom* forums to learn how the guys are getting around it.

everything alone that worked on the previous models and have addressed only what required fixing. Those already well acquainted with the *Wee* will be more likely to appreciate how the new model rides and handles. Most noticeable is the front end, which feels like a completely different bike (a good thing!). It handles heavy cross-winds with substantially better control, is more balanced, and far more responsive to varying road conditions without the "pogo-sticking" found in models prior to 2012.

For long haul loads, I was already accustomed to how my '08 felt, so I strapped the same gear (typical of what's needed for a multi-month, or longer trip) onto the review bike. All in all, it felt no different than a lightweight pillion, and the added weight barely affected the bike's handling characteristics. The shape of the panniers, does add a little airstream resistance, but the nature of adventure riding isn't about speed. Therefore, these kinds of things have little relevance. Some loads required an easy adjustment of the monoshock, but the rear remained manageable, not mushy, and never bogged me down.

There's a new dash that's much more visible and less likely to "black out" when using polarized sunglasses or helmet visors. The readout is nice and big, with an analog-style tach on the left and a large LCD readout on the right for speed, time, fuel, engine temp, etc. Simple, easy to read, clean and not distracting.

The new version has a little extra torque where it's needed, along with more of an

even power curve than the original. Shifting is flawless and tight. Since the late '70s I've been impressed with *Suzuki's* clutch engineering. I don't know how they do it, but they're extremely s-m-o-o-t-h, and light, without the all-too-common overheating or grabbing issues. The *Bosch*-designed ABS performed flawlessly on pavement/concrete roadways... wet or dry. However, switching from my '08 that doesn't have ABS, to the 2012 that does, required mental calisthenics—mostly because the front brakes on the non-ABS model over-bite and require cautious use. With ABS, the braking experience is considerably more controlled, making the bike less prone to diving... saving the rider from this potentially dangerous condition.

Nonetheless, when riding off-road, not being able to turn off the ABS is a serious issue. Virtually all German and Brit adventure-class bikes come from the factory with "ABS off" switches, whereas the Japanese failed to include this "option" in their designs. The Japanese, in particular, seem to be taking their time to comprehend what adventure biking is actually about.¹ Conversations with manufacturers about these nefarious "ABS off" switches has led to some mighty interesting remarks (our favorite so far is, "Why would you want to take this bike off-road?"). Subsequently, resourceful riders have taken matters into their own hands with chatter on the forums about which fuses to pull, wiring "off" switches into the circuit, etc. And apparently there's a resourceful entrepreneur who's planning to bring an "ABS off" switch to the market soon. But, as far as we've been able to determine, the reason why these switches aren't included seems to be a case of genre ignorance. *Suzuki* could benefit by talking to our community a little more.



PROS

- Sleeker design.
- Good suspension, at last!
- Much-improved handling.
- Already 90% equipped for adventure riding.
- More comfortable for the long haul.
- Great dash design.
- Carries gear effortlessly.

CONS

- Front fender too close to tire, must be modified for knobbies and/or more clearance.
- ABS cannot be turned off.
- Stock model should come with a skid plate and hand guards.
- Could use fold-up foot controls.
- Geometry not suited for sustained stand-up riding on pegs.
- Needs power outlets for accessories.



Final Impressions

The new *Adventure* model comes with virtually everything you'll need except, possibly, a navi mount and a couple *Powerlet* ports. There are also a few necessary factory and/or aftermarket accessories you shouldn't be without: skid plate, centerstand, handlebar guards and heated grips. Curiously, the factory doesn't offer a skid plate, *per se*, but instead catalogs an optional plastic "lower fairing" (or "under cowling"), designed more to improve the aerodynamics rather than armor the bike's exposed engine from the elements. However, this oversight is easily cured, and the aftermarket comes to the rescue with *Touratech* and *Twisted Throttle* supplying the most popular skid plate alternatives.

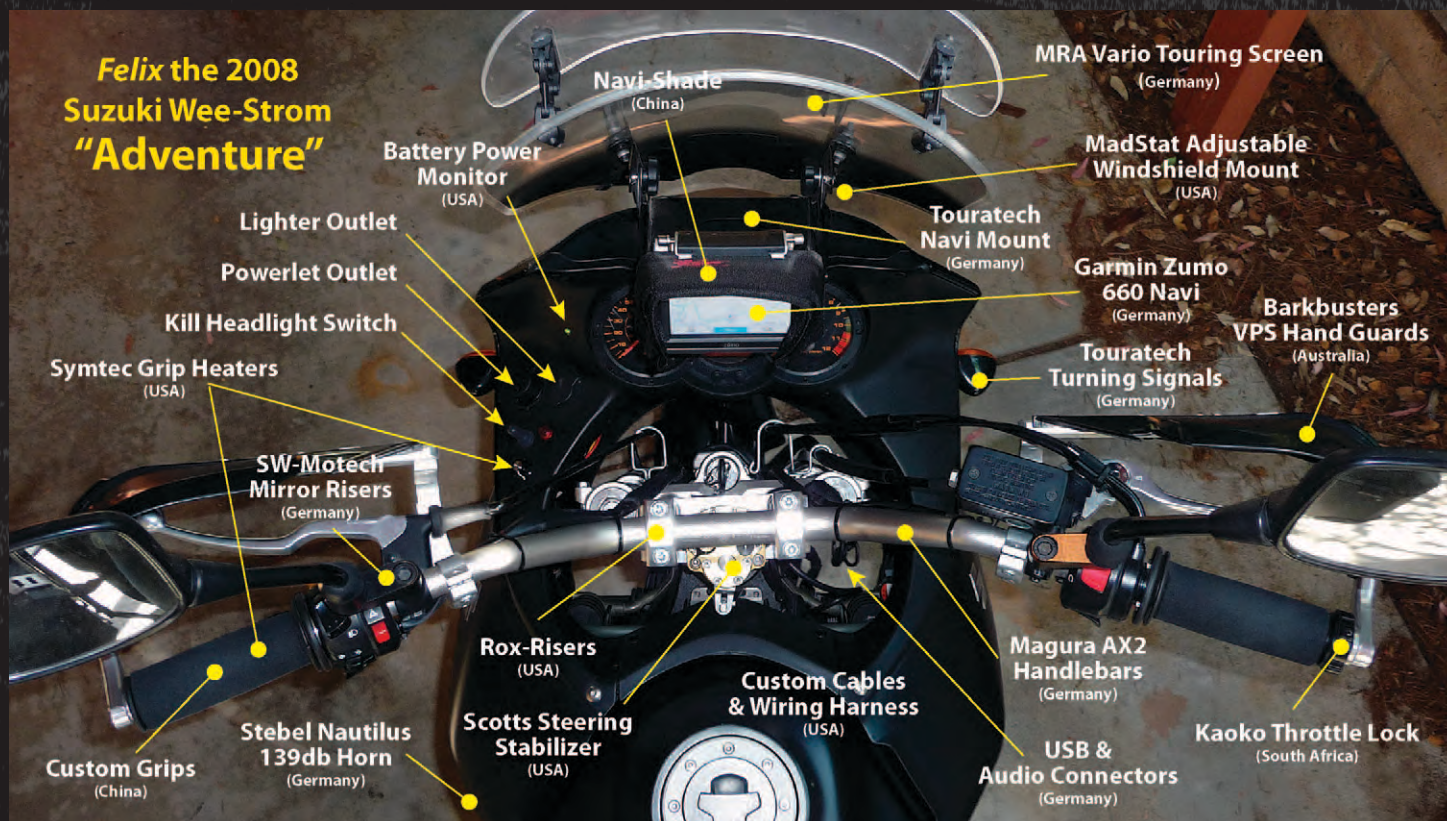
With the new 650 *Adventure*, Suzuki has evolved and

further perfected their *Wee-Strom* over the previous versions. Designed and constructed with ease of basic service in mind, it's all but maintenance-free—virtually guaranteed to get you to the far corners of the world without the need for any major wrenching. Even the suspension has been tweaked to something akin to my VERY expensive upgrades.²

Granted, I spent a small fortune experimenting with mods on my older model *V-Strom*. But the new *Adventure* delivers a similar result, with a few hundred bucks for necessary extras—for a lot less moolah. Again, depending upon how you define "adventure riding," this is a well thought-out package, with very little room for improvement. **ADV**

¹Case in point: Take a look at *Cycle World's* so-called "Adventure Challenge," a web-based video series—where versions of the Honda NC700X "Adventure" are pitted against each other in "challenges" such as riding along California's super freeways, grocery store shopping runs, etc. We can't make this up! And, we don't know whose brain-child this advertising campaign is, but for gawd sake, somebody there needs to break out the dictionary.

²Of all the mods I tested on my 2008 *Wee*, the single most important was the suspension. The stock front forks were mushy, pogo-stick-like—and they had to go. After *Lindemann Suspension* (**LE-Suspension.com**) rebuilt the forks, and *Progressive Suspension* (**ProgressiveSuspension.com**) installed one of their 465 monoshocks in the rear, the bike was transformed—completely transformed.



Felix the 2008 Suzuki Wee-Strom "Adventure"

Mod mania? The photo above, with corresponding captions, indicates many of the modifications the author experimented with on his '08 V-Strom to "adventurize" it for an RTW trip. The *Scotts Steering Stabilizer*, for example, was added in an attempt to cut some of the front end shake and dampen road vibration when the bike was under full load. The *Magura* bars increased the diameter to 1.25" from 7/8", also lessening road vibration, and along with the *Rox Risers*, raised the height another four inches (requiring new throttle and clutch cables) to make standing on the pegs possible (for a tall rider). The headlight kill switch is intended to conserve battery power during cold climate starts, and also for countries where it is illegal to drive with headlights on during the daytime. The single most significant improvement was the *Lindemann Suspension* fork modifications. This upgrade, above all others, improved the stability and riding experience dramatically. Several other changes were made after this photo, such as the clutch and brake levers. On the '08 model in particular, the stock front brakes are extremely grabby, so a shorty front brake lever helped lessen the chance of over-gripping. Right: The dash of the 2012 *Adventure*. There are so many great improvements to this model that Paul recommends only getting the heated grips and the grip shield options. A navi and *Powerlet* jacks, should also be considered.



MSRP: \$9,999

(PLUS RECOMMENDED OPTIONS)

SUZUKICYCLES.COM

SPECIFICATIONS

('08 VARIANCES IN PARENTHESIS)

ENGINE: 645cc, 4-stroke, 2-cylinder, liquid-cooled, DOHC, 90-degree V-Twin

COMPRESSION RATIO: 12.2:1 (was 11.5:1)

FUEL SYSTEM: fuel injection

LUBRICATION: wet sump

TRANSMISSION: 6-speed, constant mesh

FINAL DRIVE: chain, DID525V8, 118 links

FRONT SUSPENSION: telescopic, coil spring, oil damped

REAR SUSPENSION: link type, coil spring, oil damped

FRONT BRAKES: twin disc

REAR BRAKES: disc

FRONT TIRE: 110/80R19M/C 59H, tubeless

REAR TIRE: 150/70R17M/C 69H, tubeless

FUEL TANK CAPACITY: 5.3 US gallons (was 5.81 U.S. gallons)

COLOR: Metallic Thunder Grey

IGNITION: electronic ignition (transistorized)

OVERALL LENGTH: 90.2 inches

OVERALL WIDTH: 32.9 inches (was 33.1 inches)

WHEELBASE: 62.4 inches (was 61.2 inches)

GROUND CLEARANCE: 6.9 inches

SEAT HEIGHT: 32.9 inches (adjustable)

DRY WEIGHT: ~472 lbs.