

# HOW SUZUKI FIXED THE CELERIO



In the wake of the brake failures suffered by the new Celerio, Suzuki responded swiftly to put things right. **Lewis Kingston** recounts the saga

**O**n Friday 30 January, during Autocar's emergency stop test in controlled circumstances at Millbrook Proving Ground, a new Suzuki Celerio suffered complete brake failure.

This was unheard of. Yes, there had been instances of brake fade or a loss of vacuum assistance following repeated hard stops in Autocar's extensive history of testing. There had even been cases of brake pads catching fire – a result of the intense heat caused by repeated hard stops – but never in our recollection had a car suffered a problem that resulted in a complete absence of stopping power.

Our first action was to inform Suzuki. The car was promptly recovered for inspection and another one was delivered to allow our testing to continue. When the second Celerio suffered exactly the same failure, leaving fellow reviewer Matt

Saunders and me sailing unchecked down Millbrook's mile-long straight, the situation escalated.

When we told Suzuki about this second failure, Japanese engineers who had been in the UK the week before for a press event were recalled to inspect the problem. At that time, the first right-hand-drive Celerios were reaching customers and dealers and Suzuki had arranged a sizeable weekend media campaign around its new model.

Although some customers were still able to book test drives in the Celerio over that weekend, by the Monday Suzuki had recalled the 37 cars that had reached buyers in the UK and cancelled all test drives until its investigation was completed.

On 9 February we were back at Millbrook – at Suzuki's behest – in order to test the revisions that had been made to the Celerio. Chief engineer Shigeki Suzuki was present

Shigeki Suzuki (on left) tells our man how they fixed it





LEWIS KINGSTON

## Once it went wrong, Suzuki got it right

A MANUFACTURER'S PROMPT response is of the utmost importance in situations like this. The sooner the customers are informed, the cars are off the road and the inspections and revisions made, the better. For a company to leave the customers to find out about a potential failure the hard way is simply unacceptable, particularly if it's one that's easily demonstrated and identified.

The response from Suzuki has been appropriately quick and comprehensive –

and no one is any the worse for wear, which is ultimately the best possible outcome in a situation like this. As demonstrated here, the redesigned part appears to prevent the original failure, so I wouldn't hesitate to drive a new Celerio again. Mistakes do happen and the companies have to deal with the consequences – and Suzuki has certainly dealt with this in an effective fashion. It's a good start to rebuilding confidence and trust in the brand's products, that's for sure.



A fault caused the brake pedal to detach prematurely



to demonstrate and explain the changes. He showed us two brake pedal assemblies: the current production item and a revised production prototype.

In the centre of the original pedal assembly is a small metal piece that is integrated into the brake pedal linkage. It is the brake pedal retraction system, which is designed to prevent the pedal from causing injury to the driver in a frontal impact. This mechanism was only fitted to cars in the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand, where safety regulations necessitated it.

When a significant force – which should be above that used in emergency braking – is applied, this component in the pedal assembly detaches from its mounting. This causes the brake pedal to drop away, preventing an impact with the driver's legs. Similarly, if the bulkhead begins to deform in a

collision, the link can detach, again causing the pedal to retract safely.

It transpires that the design of the original part resulted in an overly sensitive safety system, one that could leave a driver with no brakes at all. The revised pedal assembly, on the other hand, has a much thicker and differently structured brake pedal retraction link.

"I was surprised to hear of this phenomenon," said Suzuki. "We had not encountered it before. We had submitted the cars to a lot of testing but nothing had happened.

"On the Saturday, I had a call from the office. Then we immediately started investigations. Within 24 hours, we had reproduced the problem Autocar experienced and had started making changes. It was discovered that a few links were bending when they should not.

"A big, sudden force through the pedal could cause the link part to


bend and prematurely detach as a result. We then set about designing, making and checking new parts. We then brought them to the UK to test them and make sure they conform."

Suzuki gestured to the revised Celerio sitting at the start of the mile straight, and I took a seat. Instead of chancing my arm, this time around I carried out a static test on the parked Suzuki. Stamping on the brake pedal repeatedly did nothing except exhaust the available vacuum assistance – the engine wasn't running – and the pedal steadfastly refused to do anything unexpected.

We headed out onto the track, wound the Celerio up to 60mph and stood on the brakes. The ABS chuntered, the tyres chirped and the car came to a halt. The stop was controlled, effective and exactly as it should have been. I stretched the Celerio to 80mph and repeated the emergency stop. The process was

repeated several times, but the brake pedal behaved exactly as it should have. It seemed clear that the issue had been resolved.

From the first failure to our test of Suzuki's remedy, 10 days had elapsed. Crucially, no customers had been in a position to suffer a failure like that experienced during our controlled tests. The cars that were recalled are now in the process of being fitted with the modified components and returned to the customers, and the Celerio is back on sale.

"We were lucky," said Suzuki as we prepared to depart – not words you generally expect to hear from an engineer, even less so one working for a mainstream car manufacturer. "We have a lot of ground to get back, but we have experienced a lot of support from our customers. If you had not tested this car, which was almost on the market, we would have had some troubles." 

# Triple test





# Don't celebrate just Yeti...

Skoda's formidable Yeti faces strong competition from the new CX-3 and Vitara family SUVs

## THE CONTENDERS

**NEW**



**Mazda CX-3**  
120 Skyactiv-G SE-L  
**List price** £18,995  
**Target Price** £18,525

The newest and dearest car here. Should be great to drive but needs to be competitive elsewhere, too.



**Skoda Yeti**  
1.2 TSI 110 SE  
**List price** £18,550  
**Target Price** £17,658

Has long been a popular choice, thanks to its rewarding driving experience and superb practicality.

**NEW**



**Suzuki Vitara**  
1.6 SZ5 2WD  
**List price** £17,999  
**Target Price** £17,562

Reasonably priced and very well equipped. It's also comparatively economical in real-world driving.

SINCE ITS LAUNCH in 2009, the Skoda Yeti has made its way onto many a family's driveway. It appeals because it's spacious, practical, good to drive and easy to live with, and it's a manageable size.

Many manufacturers have subsequently chimed in with similar offerings, in an effort to muscle in on this lucrative and rapidly expanding market. Latest to the fray is Mazda, with its all-new CX-3. The company has long had a reputation for making cars that are good to drive, but SUV buyers want more than that. So, the CX-3 will have to measure up on both running costs and practicality.

Our third contender is the new Suzuki Vitara. It's spacious, has a petrol engine that's surprisingly frugal in real-world driving, and in range-topping SZ5 trim it has stacks of standard kit. Despite all that, the Vitara is actually the cheapest of our trio to buy. >>

Photography: John Bradshaw

# Triple test

## What are they like to drive?

The Mazda is by far the most nimble of the trio. Its steering is fast and its body doesn't lean much in corners, allowing you to make quick and comfortable-feeling changes of direction. The front end is very grippy, too, so the CX-3 feels right at home darting across country, while light and precise steering make it easy around town.

The Yeti feels nearly as nimble, although its taller body makes it a little more wayward in the corners because it's slightly more prone to roll. Still, it grips well, and has far heavier steering, which makes it feel more stable at higher speeds, even though there isn't quite as much feedback. The other downside is that the Yeti's steering can feel a touch too heavy at slower speeds, particularly when parking.

The Suzuki is the least capable of the three in corners. Its steering is overly light and the car's initial responses quite sluggish, while its softer suspension causes it to lean the most. It just doesn't feel as well tied down as the Yeti or Mazda, and so inspires the least confidence.

The trade-off is that the Vitara rides more smoothly than either the CX-3 or Yeti, which are firmer and tend to jostle you around more around town. The Yeti is the firmest in town, whereas the Mazda is the least settled on the motorway – you don't just feel bumps through your backside, you feel them shuddering up through the steering wheel.

We've no issues with the way the Mazda accelerates, though. Its eager engine delivers a decent amount of low-down shove, even in higher gears, and it outpaces its rivals with ease. Both the Yeti and the Vitara have to be worked much harder.

The Vitara is the noisiest on the move, with pronounced wind noise from the front pillars and mirrors. The Mazda and Yeti are quieter at a steady cruise, although the CX-3's engine is noisy when revved and the Yeti's suspension can be heard on poorly surfaced roads.

'The new Vitara rides much more smoothly than either the Yeti or the CX-3'

## MAZDA CX-3



Great to drive, with little roll in corners, but the ride can be unforgiving



The CX-3 has the smallest boot here but rear seats fold down flat to boost space



Limited rear room. Dark, too, because of the small, tapering rear windows



## SKODA YETI



Decent steering compensates for a bouncy ride and some body lean

## BEST BOOT



Yeti has the biggest boot here and most flexible seats. Great for families



Most room in the rear by far. You can sit three adults abreast, too, if need be



## SUZUKI VITARA

## BEST RIDE



Vitara rides in a supple fashion. Its steering could be better, though



Low boot lip and big opening makes the Vitara easy to load



Panoramic roof cuts headroom in the rear; legroom is fine, though



# Mazda CX-3 vs Skoda Yeti vs Suzuki Vitara



Big rotary dials for the heating and ventilation controls make climate adjustments easy

Modern-looking instrument cluster provides plenty of info and is easy to read at a glance

## INFOTAINMENT

### Mazda CX-3

The CX-3 has one of the best infotainment systems in the class, although it doesn't include sat-nav. You'll have to move up to an SE-L Nav version for that, which adds £600 to the price. Regardless, the rotary controller (behind the gearlever) makes the Mazda's 7.0in system easy to use. The voice control system is excellent, too. It comes with DAB, USB and Bluetooth connectivity, too.



### What are they like inside?

Only the Suzuki and Skoda offer that high-set and upright driving position that many look for in a compact SUV. The Mazda is shorter and feels more like a traditional hatchback from behind the wheel. The view out isn't as good as those in the Yeti and Vitara, which have larger windows.

The CX-3 has the most comfortable and supportive seats, and while those in the Yeti and Vitara's are comfortable enough, they don't have enough side support to hold you in place through corners. Many may also find it hard to find a decent seating position in the Yeti, because the height adjustment for both its steering wheel and driver's seat is a little limited.

The Skoda is by far the most spacious, though, because of its tall, boxy shape. You can sit three adults abreast in its rear seat, which is a squeeze in the other two cars.

The Yeti also has the biggest boot and the most flexible seating layout. The three seats in the back slide back and forth, recline, fold flat and can even be removed entirely. The other two cars have fixed rear seats that fold down in a conventional 60:40 split when you need to carry larger items.

The Vitara isn't great for rear headroom, particularly in SZ5 trim, which includes a headroom-shrinking glass roof. However, it's still roomier than the Mazda, which also has the smallest boot.

The Skoda has the plushiest and most neatly designed cabin. It feels hard wearing and the materials used are of a good quality. The Mazda's cabin is well laid out and interesting to look at but there are too many different materials and none is particularly tactile.

It's the Suzuki that's least impressive inside, with hard plastics everywhere. Fortunately it looks quite smart and the wheel and gearlever are pleasant enough to touch, preventing it feeling too much like a budget choice. >>



## BEST DRIVING POSITION

Controls are all clearly marked and easy to use. Switchgear feels durable

It's not the most stylish of dashboards but it feels well built and of a decent quality

### Skoda Yeti

Yeti doesn't come with sat-nav but its 6.5in touchscreen infotainment system works well. The interface is easy to use but there aren't many functions. It's neat how the icons spring to life when you move your finger close to it, however. DAB is a £135 option but you do get Bluetooth, an SD slot, aux-in and USB sockets. The 'Amundsen' media upgrade is £755 but adds a bigger screen, sat-nav, voice control and Bluetooth.



Screen looks smart and is easy to use but fingerprints can tarnish the view quickly

Hard plastic on the doors feels a little cheap, but the rest of the interior looks smart

### Suzuki Vitara

A pleasingly sharp and clear display that's easy to navigate. However, it can be a little slow to respond sometimes, and the slider for the volume is a little fiddly. Fortunately, the supplementary controls on the steering wheel mean you rarely have to use it. The Vitara's the only car to get sat-nav as standard here, though, which is impressive given the price. The navigation works well, too. DAB is standard, as is Bluetooth.



'The CX-3 feels like a traditional hatchback from behind the wheel'

**AD**

# Mazda CX-3 vs Skoda Yeti vs Suzuki Vitara

# Triple test

## What will they cost?

The Yeti might not be the cheapest to buy, but it'll cost the least to own over three years by around £700, mainly due to its slow depreciation.

If you're not buying outright then you'll find the Skoda even more enticing, because it has the lowest monthly PCP costs of the trio. Put down a deposit of £4000 and, based on 12,000 miles a year and a three-year contract, you'll pay £195 a month for the Skoda. That's £40 less than the Mazda and £64 less than the Suzuki.

It's a shame that the Yeti's real-world fuel economy doesn't come close to its claimed figure, though. During our True MPG tests it returned only 39.8mpg, leaving it trailing the other cars by some distance. Fortunately, it's cheaper than its rivals elsewhere to offset its poorer economy.

The cleaner, more economical Suzuki is the best choice for company car drivers. It has the lowest emissions of the three, placing it in a lower benefit-in-kind (BIK) tax band. You'll pay £114 a month to run one, whereas the Skoda will set you back £123. The Mazda's the most expensive of the trio, costing £138.

Additionally, the Suzuki has the most kit. It's the only car here with satellite-navigation, and it also features luxuries including adaptive cruise control, LED headlights and a reversing camera.

The Yeti and Mazda aren't poorly equipped, by any stretch, however. They get most of the kit you'll want, including dual-zone climate, cruise control and Bluetooth connectivity.

Buyers should expect few issues with any of the three cars. The companies here all performed very well in our most recent reliability survey. Out of 37 manufacturers, Suzuki was second, Mazda fourth and Skoda eighth. The Yeti was also one of the most reliable cars covered in the latest ownership satisfaction survey.

Euro NCAP has awarded its maximum five-star crash test rating to the Yeti and the Vitara, but the CX-3 has yet to be tested. The Mazda 2 on which it is based earned four stars, however, although the CX-3 features more safety kit. >>

## WHAT WILL IT COST YOU?



**Mazda CX-3**  
The priciest of the trio to buy and run



**Skoda Yeti**  
Poor economy offset by slow depreciation



**Suzuki Vitara**  
Well equipped and should be supremely reliable

## CHEAPEST PRIVATE BUY

### Prices

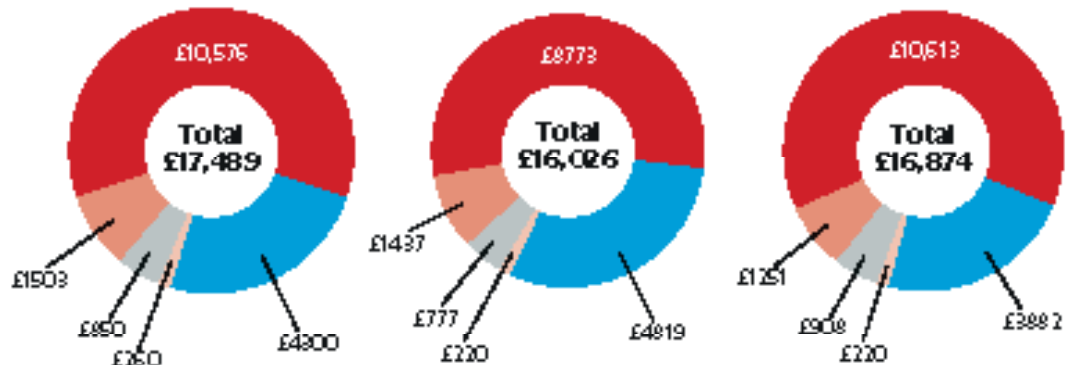
Model	Mazda CX-3	Skoda Yeti	Suzuki Vitara
List price	£18,995	£18,550	£17,999
Target Price	£18,575	£17,658	£17,952
Company car tax until April 2016/01/18/19	£138/£150/£163/£176 per month	£123/£136/£148/£160 per month	£114/£126/£138/£150 per month
Contract hire (per month)	£325	£256	£288

### Resale value @ 3 years

Year	Mazda CX-3	Skoda Yeti	Suzuki Vitara
1	£11,775 (62%)	£12,837 (69%)	£10,204 (57%)
2	£9,674 (51%)	£10,672 (58%)	£8,476 (47%)
3	£7,949 (42%)	£8,885 (48%)	£6,949 (39%)
4	£6,003 (32%)	£7,002 (38%)	£5,603 (31%)

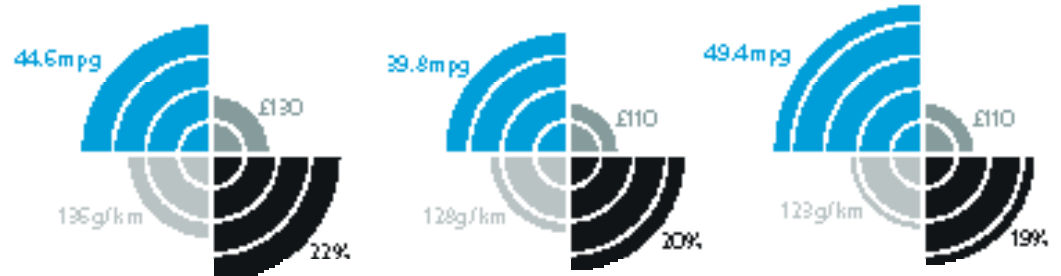
### Three-year cost

Depreciation Insurance Servicing Road tax TrueMPG



### Emissions and economy

TrueMPG VED from second year CO2 2015/16 tax liability



## EQUIPMENT

	Alloys	Colour screen size	DAB/USB/Bluetooth	Air-con/ climate control	Multi-function steering wheel	Sat-nav	Cruise control	Front/rear sensors	Speakers	Airbags	Metallic paint	Auto lights/wipers
<b>Mazda CX-3</b>	16in	7.0in	✓/✓*/✓	✓/✓	✓	£600	✓	X/✓	6	6	£540	✓/✓
<b>Skoda Yeti</b>	17in	6.5in	£135/✓/✓	✓/✓	✓	£600**	✓	£350/✓	8	7	£535	£260
<b>Suzuki Vitara</b>	17in	7.0in	✓/✓/✓	✓/✓	✓	✓	✓	✓/✓***	6	7	£430	✓/✓

\*2x USB \*\*Inclusive of DAB radio \*\*\*Inclusive rear view camera

# Triple test

## STATS, SPECS AND RATINGS

### Mazda CX-3

120 Skyactiv-G SE-L

List price £18,995 Target Price £18,525

### Skoda Yeti

1.2 TSI 110 SE

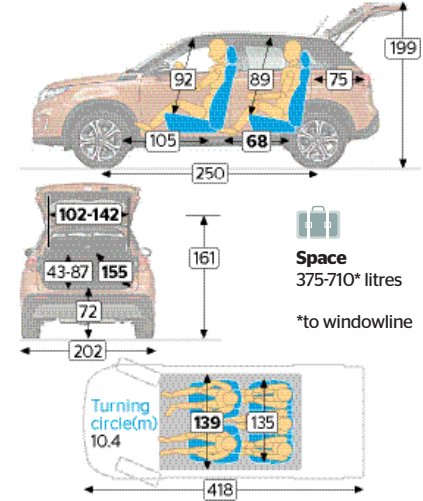
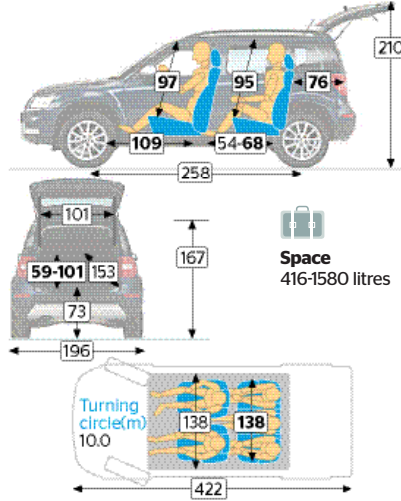
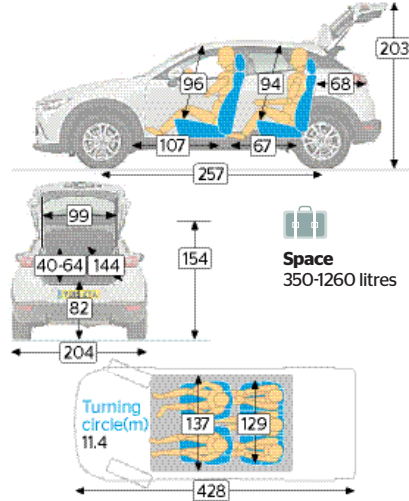
List price £18,550 Target Price £17,658

### Suzuki Vitara

1.6 SZ5 2WD

List price £17,999 Target Price £17,562

**Measurements** Internal figures in **bold** are best in test. Dimensions in cm



### Economy

**True MPG** 44.6mpg  
**Average (Govt)** 47.9mpg  
**Tank** 48 litres  
**Emissions** 137g/km, Euro 6

**True MPG** 39.8mpg  
**Average (Govt)** 51.4mpg  
**Tank** 55 litres  
**Emissions** 128g/km, Euro 6

**True MPG** 49.4mpg  
**Average (Govt)** 53.3mpg  
**Tank** 47 litres  
**Emissions** 123g/km, Euro 6

### Safety

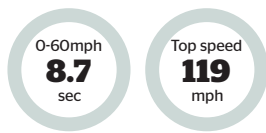
Euro NCAP crash rating  
**Not tested**

Euro NCAP crash rating **★★★★★**  
 ⚙️ 92% 🛡️ 78% 🚗 46% 🚚 71%

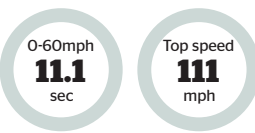
Euro NCAP crash rating **★★★★★**  
 ⚙️ 89% 🛡️ 85% 🚗 76% 🚚 75%

### Engine and performance

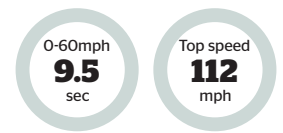
**Size** 1998cc, 4cyl petrol  
**Peak power** 118bhp@6000rpm  
**Peak torque** 154lb ft@2800rpm



**Size** 1197cc, 4cyl turbo petrol  
**Peak power** 109bhp@5600rpm  
**Peak torque** 129lb ft@4000rpm

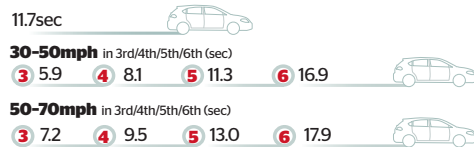
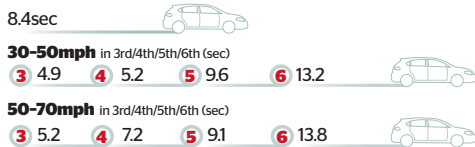


**Size** 1586cc, 4cyl petrol  
**Peak power** 118bhp@6000rpm  
**Peak torque** 115lb ft@4400rpm

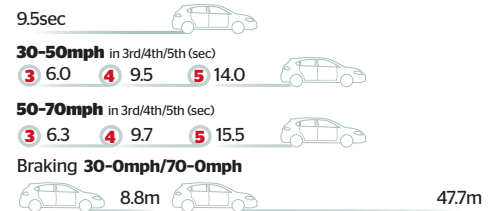


### Performance figures

Acceleration **30-70mph** through the gears



Weather conditions **Dry**



### Buying

Website [www.mazda.co.uk](http://www.mazda.co.uk)  
**Car pictured** Mazda CX-3 2.0 120ps 2WD SE-L. Nav with optional Ceramic Metallic paint (£540)

Website [www.skoda.co.uk](http://www.skoda.co.uk)  
**Car pictured** Skoda Yeti Outdoor SE 1.2 TSI 110PS with optional Petrol Blue Metallic paint (£535)

Website [www.suzuki.co.uk](http://www.suzuki.co.uk)  
**Car pictured** Suzuki Vitara 1.6 Petrol Allgrip 6MT SZ5 with optional Horizon Orange and Black exterior finish (£800)

## OVERALL VERDICT

Performance	★★★★★
Ride & handling	★★★★○
Refinement	★★★○○
Behind the wheel	★★★★○
Quality & reliability	★★★★○
Space & practicality	★★○○○
Infotainment systems	★★★○○
Buying & owning	★★★★○
Equipment	★★★★○
Safety & security	★★★★○
	★★★★○○○

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Space & practicality	★★★★★
Infotainment systems	★★★○○
Buying & owning	★★★★○
Equipment	★★★★○
Safety & security	★★★★○
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Ride & handling	★★★★○
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Behind the wheel	★★★★○
Quality & reliability	★★★★○
Space & practicality	★★★★○
Infotainment systems	★★★★○
Buying & owning	★★★★○
Equipment	★★★★★
Safety & security	★★★★○
	★★★★★○○

# Mazda CX-3 vs Skoda Yeti vs Suzuki Vitara

## OUR VERDICT

1

**Skoda Yeti**  
1.2 TSI 110 SE



**For** Big and practical cabin; fine road manners; cheapest to own  
**Against** Choppy ride; so-so real-world economy; few tech treats  
**Verdict** Feeling its age a little, but still one of our favourite small SUVs



2 **Suzuki Vitara**  
1.6 SZ5 2WD



**For** Loads of kit; low price; eager engine; soft ride  
**Against** Interior feels low-quality; lacklustre steering; heavy depreciation  
**Verdict** Worth considering if value is your top priority

3 **Mazda CX-3**  
120 Skyactiv-G SE-L



**For** Strong engine; tidy handling; infotainment system  
**Against** Limited space; pokey boot; too expensive  
**Verdict** Great to drive but costly and no more practical than a small hatchback

See how other small SUVs compare in our buyer's guide on p92

DESPITE THE FACT it's nearly six years old, it's the Yeti that triumphs here. It's neither as fast as its rivals nor as well equipped, but its practical nature and on-road manners more than compensate for its foibles elsewhere.

It's also the cheapest of the three to own privately, the cheapest company car, and the most affordable each month for those buying on PCP finance. The Skoda is the most upmarket inside, too, with a conservative and sturdy interior built from high-quality materials.

'The practicality and on-road manners of the Yeti make up for its shortcomings'

Suzuki's Vitara puts up a good fight, partly thanks to its more generous list of standard equipment, plus its impressive real-world fuel economy and its low purchase price. It might not steer as keenly as the Skoda and its interior is neither as plush nor as practical, but it's the heavy depreciation and comparatively high monthly PCP costs that stop it from winning.

That leaves the Mazda in third. The way the new CX-3 looks will undoubtedly attract plenty of suitors, and there's also lots to like

about the way the CX-3 drives, too; it's unquestionably the most capable and fun through corners and easily the nippiest in a straight line. Sadly, it just isn't practical enough nor cheap enough to buy or run, which makes it hard to justify.

Mazda rightly points out that a large proportion of buyers in this class take out PCP finance, and that the CX-3's monthly costs in this area are competitive. However, the Skoda's are even more so, and the Mazda is the most expensive of the three for cash buyers.

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# 1968 Dodge Charger long-term test: first report

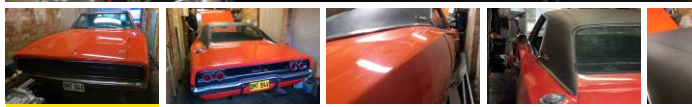
It's been off the road for a decade and is in need of some serious recommissioning, but there might be life in the old Dodge yet



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by [Lewis Kingston](#)  
17 June 2015

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**Click, eBay. Nope. Click, owners' forums. Nothing of interest. Click, [PistonHeads](#). Zilch. Gumtree, nada. Autotrader, nowt. And lo, the cycle did repeat ad infinitum. My evenings had become endlessly repetitive trawls of the same websites, magazines and forums.**

I was searching, in vain it seemed, for a new car. The net was cast far and wide, even encompassing classified sites for mainland Europe, but little was compelling me to part with my money. The frustration was palpable.

Part of the problem was that I had absolutely no idea what I wanted. Rarely had I set out to buy one particular car, instead usually just parachuting into whatever piqued my curiosity at the time. The past few years had seen me go from an E34-generation BMW M5 into a 1968 Pontiac Firebird, before settling for a while

**NEW FORD GRAND C-MAX ZETEC**  
1.0-litre EcoBoost 100PS

Excess mileage charge may apply. Finance subject to status. Guarantee/Indemnities may be required. Ford Personal Lease is provided by ALD Automotive Ltd t/a as Ford Lease. You will not own the car at the end of the agreement.

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## Driven this week

[2016 Ariel Nomad Supercharged review](#)  
**FIRST DRIVE**  
16 October 2015  
Not perfect, but still one of the most entertaining cars we have encountered not only this year, but this century

[2015 Toyota Mirai review](#)  
**FIRST DRIVE**  
16 October 2015  
Toyota's production ready hydrogen-powered Mirai shows promise but will be a rare sight on our roads

[2015 Volvo S60 Polestar review](#)  
**FIRST DRIVE**  
15 October 2015  
Volvo wants Polestar to rival the likes of Mercedes-AMG and BMW M, so does its S60 - not available in the UK - show there is hope for the future?

[2016 Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV GX4hs review](#)  
**FIRST DRIVE**  
15 October 2015  
Top-selling plug-in SUV gets major revisions to styling and suspension as Mitsubishi bids

**OUR VERDICT >>**

**Dodge Challenger SRT Hellcat**

The new 707bhp Challenger is an extreme beast that would make little sense on British roads, but we're glad it exists

with a Lancia Delta Integrale. There had even been a quick dabble with a remarkably unmolested high-mileage Fiero, just out of pure curiosity, and [a brief spell with a Jaguar XJ](#).

My only quantifiable thoughts about my next purchase were that, whatever the car was, it had to have a real sense of occasion to it. Something so capable that it was otherwise humdrum unless piloted like it was being pursued by a heat-seeking missile didn't appeal, either; I wanted to be able to be able to revel in the experience without having to fear for my licence.

That said, and in a slightly contradictory fashion, the odd Nissan Skyline grabbed my attention; I had wanted to own a clean R32 GT-R for a long time, preferably before they became too expensive - or extinct. The sight of that twin-turbo straight six stretching from nose to bulkhead never failed to raise a smile, and all the reports suggested that they were quite mechanical-feeling and engaging cars.

I had the disconcerting feeling, on the flip side, that even if I bought an immaculate R32, it wouldn't treat me well. The thought of hearing a knock from deep within the motor following a hefty dose of boost gave me The Fear, and ultimately I wanted something I could hammer on without having to wonder when it'd turn itself into a cloud of red-hot shrapnel.

Compounding that concern, the worry of a four-figure invoice being generated at the drop of a bolt was one of the reasons I'd sold my Lancia. I felt continuing to drive it in a proper fashion would lead to it depleting my finances comprehensively, which wasn't an appealing or enjoyable state of affairs. I didn't, at the end of the day, have an endless pot.

The oscillation between myriad classified pages seemed set to continue indefinitely, until, click, I looked more closely at the [Mopar Muscle Association UK's forum](#). It was one of several muscle car-related sites that I regularly revisited, but most cars featured commanded serious money. As much as I loved the idea of owning an immaculate 1970 Dodge Challenger R/T 440 Six Pack, I didn't have £50k to spend on one. I'd capped myself at £10,000, at a push, but I wanted a little left over so I could make the car my own and ensure it was in fine fettle.

The idea of buying another muscle car, or at least an American classic, locked a little more securely into my mind, however. The looks, the noise, the charisma, all those gratifying sensations they deliver just rolling down the road, were just what I was looking for. Plus it would likely be a car I could easily work on and upgrade, lending the concept further appeal.

Buried among the listings on the site was a 1968 Dodge Charger - yes, the same year as the one featured in 'Bullit'. I'd glanced over it a few days prior and dismissed it because it had been parked for a decade and the seller was asking £15,000 for it. I didn't have £15,000, for starters, and I wasn't keen on the idea of another project which would entail further expenditure. Pushing the budget for an unknown quantity seemed masochistic, too, so I parked the idea and moved on.

to keep its market advantage



#### [2015 Lexus GS F review](#)

##### FIRST DRIVE

14 October 2015

A fine chassis, engine and ownership proposition - but still more curio than credible alternative

I made another cup of tea and set about wading through a few other options. A clean RX-7 came and went, a tidy E36 M3 saloon nudged onto my radar, another V8-engined Triumph 2000 prompted a smile, but something odd was happening. Unconsciously, I was going back to the Dodge's advert intermittently, my brain seemingly attempting to assimilate any unseen details and build a stronger case for it.

The effort wasn't in vain; I stumbled across a gallery of pictures showing the car through the ages, including a moderate restoration in the late Nineties. It looked a very straight, honest example. A rarity, in that respect, given that many American classics have been so hacked about that there's rarely an untouched wire or factory panel on them. It wasn't a matching numbers car, having its original 383-cubic inch V8 replaced by a later 440, and it had been through a few colour changes, but it was otherwise unmodified.

The more I thought about it, the more it tugged on the former muscle-car owner strings in my heart. So, just out of interest, I got a pen and some paper and went searching for previously sold Chargers in the UK and Europe. I jotted down the asking price or sale figures for the 16 similar cars I found and tallied an average of £28,000.

A last-minute discovery of a satin black '68 in the UK for £25,000 further suggested that the £15,000 asking price for this Dodge wasn't unreasonable. Surely I could get it going for the difference, and perhaps even stand to profit, if I did have to sell it?

Furthermore, £15,000 didn't actually seem to get much in the way of a sought-after mainstream muscle car in today's market. It might get you into a clean notchback Mustang, a mint Buick or countless Seventies' classics, but they didn't appeal to the same extent. I'd sold my '68 Firebird for £13,000 and suspected, even though it wasn't quite on the same page as the prime collector's choices, that it too was probably worth more now. After all, everyone was buying up the popular cars, forcing the price of the less well-known examples up.

I then made the dangerous decision to pay Summit Racing's website a visit and totted up the prices for a complete suspension rebuild, new brakes and some other light restoration work. Putting further pen to paper suggested I could get the whole thing rolling, provided the powertrain was good, for about £3000. Click, my bank's website. Click, yes, we will loan you some money. I could take all of my savings, totalling some £12,500, and borrow £7500. The finances, at a glance, appeared viable.

By this point I was in the dangerous position of a) having convinced myself I could do it and that b) it was a good idea. Phrases like "Mopar or no Car" began bounding around my Dodge-addled brain. Lots of interest in the car was now being expressed online, too, adding gallons of high-octane to my already brightly burning Charger-shaped fire. "It's a steal," said one forum member. "Assume the gentleman has had his arm bitten off for this," added another.

I could feel my dreams of burbling around Teddington sinking at a

vast rate of knots, so I picked up the phone. It was still for sale, and after half an hour's chat with the owner, Steve, I felt like I had a pretty good idea of what the car was like. Somewhat annoyingly, it sounded really rather good. For the sake of my own sanity, if nothing else, I arranged to have a look at it. I had to satisfy my curiosity.

Spool forward a few days and I'm standing in front of a closed single-car garage in Dunstable. I ring the doorbell and Steve, a very amiable gentleman, greets me. We chat about the car as he grabs hold of the bottom of the garage door. He swings it open in one swoop and, uh-oh, I'm in trouble. In the shadows, pressed hard up against one wall, is all 17-feet-plus of 1968 Dodge Charger. It looked, quite frankly, amazing – and it immediately exceeded my expectations.

I donned my sensible hat, swallowed my initial excitement, and inspected the car as best I could. Truth be told, I found little to ring any alarm bells. Structurally the car appeared sound, the paintwork was bright, the panels were straight and even the interior was in pretty good shape. After all, the Charger had survived for 47 years, so there had to be some integrity to it.

The 7.2-litre V8's sump was admittedly wet with oil and, similarly, the transmission appeared to be losing a little ATF from the front and rear seals, but the mechanical side of things would be comparatively easy to deal with. Given that it had been parked so long I wasn't surprised to find it a little wet underneath anyway, given that seals tended to shrink and wither following extended periods of disuse. The brakes were shot, too, but that was entirely predictable and the least of my concerns.

A quick check of the vital fluids revealed them to be passable. The oil was glitter-free, the transmission fluid was dirty but not burnt, and the coolant was clear. Much to my surprise, Steve then offered to fire the engine up. He hooked up the battery, pumped the pedal, cranked the key and – despite being stone cold – the 440 thundered into an erratic idle. I was already using my phone and its flash to snap clearer shots of the underside of the car and managed to grab the moment the Dodge fired up on video.



The oil pressure gauge sprang to life, indicating that the main bearings didn't have clearances wide enough to drive a truck through. Outside of clearly needing a thorough service, fresh fuel and a new exhaust manifold gasket on one bank, it appeared mechanically sound. Proof, I thought, of life. I could work with this.

With the engine shut down, I flicked through the car's history, checked that it hadn't been written off, and chatted to Steve about its value. He had reputedly fielded a considerable amount of calls and emails about the Charger, and had even declined an offer of £14,000 for the car over the phone. That was the bar set, then; it was £15,000 or bust.

I told him I'd sleep on it, the price tag and restoration costs causing me some discontent, and thanked him for its time. This was not a decision to be made on the spot, regardless of how much I wanted it. However, in my heart, I had the feeling that this was a good car, and one I shouldn't pass up. I hadn't seen a '68 Charger for a long time, let alone ever been in the position to actually buy one.

My alarm went off at 6AM sharp the next day, but I was already wide awake and obsessing over potential Dodge plans. I could put it here, order these, do this, get it going; it was a non-stop train of thought that was barreling along uncontrollably. It would be the single most expensive purchase I had ever made in my life, though, and I was very tentative about spending such significant sums.

So I did what any self-respecting petrolhead would do, and called my mother. She opined the very level-headed assessment that if I had looked at it, and judged it a sound car, then it was. Based on the figures presented, she also didn't think I could do any wrong by getting into it. Yes, someone else approved of the idea. That triggered a mental green light, and I immediately picked up the phone.

All I could think was that Steve was going to say: "I'm sorry, someone's already taken it." But they hadn't, and couldn't, because I'd beaten them to the punch. I savoured my last few moments of being financially solvent, nervously stamped my feet, and tried to steady my voice. "I'll take it."

## 1968 Dodge Charger

**Price** £15,000; **Economy** 0.00mpg; **Expenses** £0.00; **Running total** £15,000; **Budget remaining** £5000; **Faults** Untested powertrain, exhaust manifold gasket leak, transmission fluid leak, failed braking system, blown bulbs, stuck in a garage

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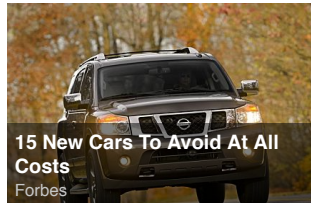
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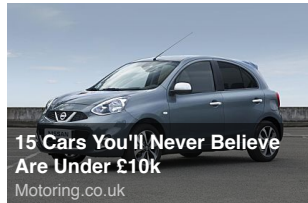
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<a href="#">scrap</a>	<p><a href="#">Good luck! She looks a beauty</a></p> <p>18 June 2015</p> <p>Good luck! She looks a beauty.</p>
<a href="#">Lewis Kingston</a>	<p><a href="#">RE: Good luck!</a></p> <p>18 June 2015</p> <p>Cheers scrap! There will be more updates in due course.</p>
<a href="#">Peter Cavellini</a>	<p><a href="#">Hmmmmm?</a></p> <p>18 June 2015</p> <p>You could have struck lucky here!,pity you didn't have a mate with you to confirm your assumptions,good luck,look forward to here the on going reports about the Car.</p> <p>Peter Cavellini.</p>
<a href="#">Lewis Kingston</a>	<p><a href="#">RE: Condition</a></p> <p>18 June 2015</p> <p>Thanks Peter! I basically went on the condition of the metalwork alone, as the rest shouldn't be too difficult or repair or replace. Parts aren't expensive, and it's not very complicated, so I don't mind having to go through it comprehensively on that front. I'm happy doing the mechanical work but I've no experience with welding. Yet, haha. Time, as they say, will tell. Got to get it out of the garage, first...</p>
<a href="#">mr pushrod</a>	<p><a href="#">Fingers crossed!</a></p> <p>18 June 2015</p> <p>I can't say I blame you for taking the plunge, it looks to be in cracking condition. Promise me you'll take it to Millbrook for a Dukes Of Hazzard style jump shot over their infamous crest!</p>

<p><a href="#">DBtechnician</a></p>	<p><a href="#">Right tool for the job !</a>                  18 June 2015                  What more do you need apart from your own oil well.   <i>Offence can only be taken not given- so give it back!</i></p>
<p><a href="#">Lewis Kingston</a></p>	<p><a href="#">RE: Consumption</a>                  18 June 2015                  True DBtechnician, true! I am already preparing myself for single-digit consumption. The Firebird was in a pretty high state of tune but it'd still do about 12-13mpg on a run; this is much heavier and has another 1.2 litres to it. It'll be interesting to see what it does...</p>
<p><a href="#">geed</a></p>	<p><a href="#">Lewis Kingston wrote: True</a>                  24 June 2015</p> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p><i>Lewis Kingston wrote: True DBtechnician, true! I am already preparing myself for single-digit consumption. The Firebird was in a pretty high state of tune but it'd still do about 12-13mpg on a run; this is much heavier and has another 1.2 litres to it. It'll be interesting to see what it does...</i></p> </div> <p>In jest or not, only a Brit could look at an iconic 60's american muscle car as gorgeous as this and mention fuel consumption! Lewis, as long as it is reasonably mechanically sound and more importantly solid underneath, it is a peach. These cars are mechanically very simple and under-stressed, You could strip this engine down with a manual in your garage. These engines were designed when fuel was oh so cheap. The terms 'fuel economy' or emissions had not been invented, if you wanted more power you bored and stroked it, put a bigger carbie on it and maybe fit a set of headers - and this is not some boy racer tune up, this is how the factories developed their high performance engines. No timing belts or tensioners to go snap, no alloy cylinder heads that will crack and of course simple ignition systems and mechanical linkages. Parts are readily available stateside, not bother. Without doubt the best car on autocars fleet. Hats of to you sir! I take it you have that v8 recording as you morning alarm?</p>
<p><a href="#">Lewis Kingston</a></p>	<p><a href="#">RE: Tuning</a>                  26 June 2015                  Morning geed! I'm looking forward to making a few tweaks to this 440. It's already got an Edelbrock intake and a set of headers but I want to get rid of the mechanical points in the distributor, so I might put a billet one in with an optical or magnetic trigger. I think the carb (currently a 650) is a bit small, too. No rush, though, just want to get it on the road first and see what's what. Really appreciate your comment and thank you for taking the time to write it. Haha, no, I don't use that recording - I'm waiting until I fix the exhaust leak, first! Hope you're well.</p>
<p><a href="#">Moparman</a></p>	<p><a href="#">Looks good!</a>                  18 June 2015                  No bubbling under the vinyl top and the undercarriage looks good. While the unibodies do tend to rust they don't always rot up like in the horror stories you hear. I had a '71 Chrysler for five years, never garaged, and only had a 2 cm rust patch to ever deal with. The powertrain is bomb-proof and with the Internet you should be able to get everything you need/want for it. Welcome to the Mopar Team!</p>

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