

## 2010 Suzuki SX-4 Sportback

Contributed by Jon Rosner / Rosner Photos  
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In the last few years, has Suzuki stepped out from the shadows of being the red-headed step-child of Japanese automakers? Suzuki has always had a following, there are car geeks who daily scan the internet with tools like [jaxed.com](http://jaxed.com)'s "mash" to search for decades old Suzukis rebadged as Geo Metros. Why? Dirt cheap parts, super-easy maintenance and a 200,000 to 300,000 anticipated lifespan -- that's cult-following material. Are the newest car still as well built? Yes, Suzuki is one of the Japanese manufacturers that has not let their quality standards fall by the wayside in the mad rush to gain market share. The SX-4 Sportback is yet another in a long line of Suzukis built to be sold around the world in the places where punishing dirt roads prevail, in places where parts availability is a near joke and the typical home-mechanic owns fewer tools than is usually found in the average \$6.99 discount store screwdriver and socket set. Add to that crap, fuels and limited access to good lubricants, and you need a product that is really rugged in terms of design and build. Can the author confirm the reputation for ruggedness from personal experience? Yes. Several years ago one friend bought the four-wheel-drive version of the SX-4, dropped in the factory-approved turbo, sprinkled in a few factory-approved suspension mods, did exactly nothing to beef up the engine internals and has been pushing the "wheel" out of it ever since. Durable and inexpensive, definitely. But, now, back to our regularly scheduled column: Our four-door SX-4 Sportback arrived in silver with substantial 205/50-16 tires (205/50-17 are optional) and a large greenhouse that allows for superb visibility with no real blindspots. The cabin is very airy, entry and exit access are superb. And the cabin offers excellent space efficiency for four large adults or two large adults up front with room for three kids in the back. All in comfortable seats, armrests, expandable sun-shades and lots of other thoughtful small touches. The SX-4 rides on a short 98.4 inch wheelbase that allows for a turning circle that is quite tight. The steering is deliciously responsive when shooting for holes in local and highway traffic. The SX-4 comes in at between 62 to 63 inches in height, depending on whether you go with the front wheel or all-wheel drive version. And in spite of sporting highly responsive KYB gas shock absorbers, the SX-4 has a soft suspension. With the tall body, the tilt angles while cornering feel almost French in absurdity. But this does not mean any lack of grip. The car sticks quite well to any chosen line even in back road bashing. And rather than going all wobbly at the limits, the SX-4 simply scrubs the tires, a very linear rally car kind of approach. Brakes are solid and clean in response, making the SX-4 a truly fun car to totally drive the crap out of on a day in and day out basis. Up to around 3,000 rpm the 2.0 liter I-4 engine is a bit light on power, but keep it spinning at or above that level and the SX-4 really zips with great aplomb, pumping out 150 horses at 6,200 rpm with 140 foot/pounds at 3,500 RPM. The SX-4 tries hard to be all things to all people and does a respectable job of it. The EPA rates the AWD CVT SX-4 at 22 and 30 for City and Highway on regular fuel. This is almost the same mileage as the 6-speed manual in the front-wheel driver version which has EPA ratings of 23 and 29. We saw a gauge-read 22 plus mpg in halting traffic around town combined with bombing around and kid commute duty. Good, considering that our CVT SX-4 was an all-wheel drive and saw go-pedal action at the deeper end of the pool. For a vehicle with a weight of between 2,732 for the FWD and 2,993 pounds for the CVT AWD, these are not top numbers. Chalk that up to the added drag from the extra-beefy engine, transmission, suspension and brake components. The Suzuki SX-4 is overshadowed now by its hot, new younger sibling, the Kizashi. No, Suzuki doesn't have a whopping big car lineup -- but better a few superbly built cars than a slew of dull-witted mobile generic appliances, fleets of hit-or-miss build-quality or eye-searing designs. With the Suzuki SX-4, function truly follows form. If simplicity, durability, low total cost of ownership for a two- or four-wheel-drive (plus, you like to drive the snot out of your car) are part of the equation, then the SX-4 Sportback should definitely be on your short list! Go ahead, see one at your Suzuki dealer.