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2010 Suzuki Kizashi

Kizashi means "something great is coming" and is pronounced Key-ZAH-shee. It is Suzuki's all-new sedan, due in North America late in 2009. Suzuki is promoting it as a more-premium, better-driving car than the generic mass-market sedan.

Suzuki named the Acura TSX, Alfa Romeo 159 and Volkswagen Passat as development benchmarks and intimated the car was designed with European tastes and needs in mind. If they match the driving characteristics and refinement of those benchmark cars for significantly less cost and deliver the efficiency, performance and packaging Europeans desire Kizashi should do well.

Kizashi is a relatively wide and tall four-door sedan. Length falls between the Lexus IS and Acura TSX, width typical for a compact/mid-size, and height more than the IS, TSX, Passat and Subaru Impreza. It is smaller than the division heavyweights Accord and Camry, and a narrowing window line, very short trunk with Mazda crossover-like tail-lights, fully encircled tailpipe openings and Audi-esque grille styling make it hard to visually scale.

The prototype we sampled was well-appointed and on appearance and finish is competitive in the market; it is not as roomy as Honda's full-size Accord but we did put 6-footers in the back seat. Eight standard airbags include rear seat side airbags designed to accommodate child seats. Trunk space looks on the competitive side though not largest, and it has a 60/40 split-fold rear seat. It will offer Bluetooth, wireless iPod/MP3 capability, navigation, moonroof, rain-sensing wipers, driver seat memory system and a 425-watt, 10-speaker sound system.

For 2010 Kizashi will be offered only with a 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine said to have class-leading power and mileage (all auto companies say that); that would mean 175-185 hp and EPA values around 23/32 mpg. Transmissions include a six-speed manual and a continuously variable (automatic) transmission, the latter also available with all-wheel drive, a feature only Subaru and Ford offer on similar-size cars. Suspension is fully independent, strut in front and multilink in back for maximum rear seat room.

Final trim levels are not set though we anticipate three variants. Suzuki also promises enthusiasts a little more entertainment by making the manual transmission available with 18-inch wheels and on more than just the base model.

Kizashi will carry the same substantial warranty as other Suzuki products, though a jump in quality ranking from 32rd to 9th this year in a leading survey suggests warranty won't be a primary consideration.

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