

**FACT FILE****Suzuki Jimny****Model:** Petrol 1.5 S.**Prices:** £15,499 - £18,999**On sale:** January 2019**Sales forecast:** 1,200 (supply limited)**Rivals:** Dacia Duster, Jeep Wrangler, Land Rover Discovery**TAKE ONE:** Shortage of supply means dealers are restricted to just one demonstrator each

# In big demand

Andrew **Charman**

## Demand for the Suzuki Jimny is high and dealers will have to manage the customer waiting list

**T**he new Suzuki Jimny SUV will launch into showrooms in January and provide dealers with a challenge they have not previously seen with the brand: a long waiting list.

The latest Jimny, which replaces a model on sale for 20 years, launched first in Japan and demand for it has been so strong that the waiting list for one now stretches over a year.

As a result the UK allocation for the first six months of 2019 is likely to number a mere 600 cars, despite a website set up by Suzuki UK to register interest in the car having already topped 10,000 responses.

"Jimny is the most irritating car I've ever had to launch," Suzuki

UK's sales head Dale Wyatt told Motor Trader.

"This car has demand way ahead of supply. It's an icon, but I have no idea how many cars I could have to sell."

Having already taken every measure possible to free up extra cars for sale, including restricting dealers to single demonstrators, Wyatt believes there is no easy fix to the supply problem. It is something that will have to be managed.

"The truth is demand is bigger than can be solved by adding a shift in the factory. It requires another factory, and dealing with that takes time so we are going to have to navigate our way through it probably for a couple of years."

Many of these potential buyers could be existing Jimny owners – the previous version sold 42,000 in the UK, with a 4,000 annual volume at its peak. In run-out phase it was selling 1,000 a year despite no marketing being applied to it.

Wyatt is telling his dealers to make the most of the supply situation, by using the Jimny as a hook to both expose customers to the brand and highlight the advantages of the All-Grip four-wheel-drive line-up, which now extends to the Ignis, Vitara and S-Cross SUVs and Swift supermini, as well as the Jimny, and Suzuki is seeing its range 4WD share climb. The 4WD version of the larger Vitara SUV takes one third of volume, compared to an average of just 7% amongst market rivals.

The Jimny launch also comes at a time when Suzuki is posting more encouraging sales figures than the currently declining overall new car market. Sales have fallen, but by only 3.9% compared to the 7% of the overall market, and Wyatt is confident of achieving end-of-year figures close to the record 39,000 of 2017.

Suzuki has also made major progress in fleet sales, its share rising from under half a per cent to 1.4%, and Wyatt is targeting an eventual 2%. "We have a profitable dealer network, with a 2.5% return on sales in October, and generally they are very happy with the brand relationship," he says, adding the only major concern is the accuracy of the dealer stock ordering system.

The brand does not anticipate any major growth beyond its current 156 outlets, Wyatt seeing the optimum network size as around 160, and which can be achieved by filling a few metropolitan areas. Of much more concern to him will be how he can source more examples of the new Jimny. **MI**

**BEHIND THE WHEEL**

The Jimny's retro styling appeals on first glance, with the high stance and squared-off arches indicating strongly the vehicle's off-road ability.

Inside provides more evidence of the target market, a functional layout with the hard-wearing surfaces and the switches intended to be operable wearing gloves. Space, meanwhile is at a premium – the Jimny is very small inside and boot space of 377 litres is only released by folding down the two rear seats – with them up just 85 litres is available.

Despite its long suspension travel the Jimny rides well on the road. The steering lacks in feel but there is little of the over-soft dynamics or dipping into corners that were formerly a hallmark of true off-roaders. The 1.5-litre engine accelerates crisply but its note does become very audible at motorway speeds.

Motorways will not be the typical environment of the Jimny, however, and off-road this SUV becomes very capable indeed, as demonstrated by a challenging course at the launch event. Those who have previously bought a Jimny for its tough, go-anywhere ability will not be disappointed by the new one.

