

Who's laughing Now?

Ian Lamming has the last laugh with the new Suzuki Baleno

CARS can be a really good ice breaker, with men and women.

Many love cars, others just want advice on the best model to buy. Some of my chums fall into the former category and when we meet up in the Lakes the car park will include a Porsche 911, a BMW M5, an Audi A7 and whatever I'm in that particular week, which always comes under close scrutiny.

This particular week, the reaction was one of open hilarity; well a chrome spoiler is never going to be taken seriously is it? And to be honest the new Suzuki Baleno is funny look fish – but I'll have the last laugh yet.

That's because Baleno is a car that shouldn't be laughed at but will make you smile as it's a cracking little drive.

Baleno has spirit, character and the most glorious engine ever. The 1.0 Boosterjet only has three cylinders, which accounts for the off-beat, pleasing growl, but offers performance that is the envy of many a large bore engine.

Taking off across and down the A66 it flew its way to well beyond what was expected in the blink of an eye. By the time I hit fifth gear the legal limit had been reached and I was in danger of being the wrong side of 70mph in an area smeared with nasty speed camera vans, who work tirelessly to

line the coffers of the blessed chancellor.

This thing is genuinely quick because somehow the engineers have managed to eek out 111PS from the diddy motor, a startling amount and no doubt linked to the technology that crosses the gap between Suzuki cars and motorcycles.

Impressive enough, you should see how the Baleno is on hill climbs, whether that is the nasty gradual inclines that lurk on our upland motorways, that gradually leech away momentum on many a tiny motor, or the really steep stuff the Lake District has to offer.

Anyone who has climbed from Lake Windermere via Gummer's How will appreciate what a steep incline that is. I kid you not, Baleno flew up in fourth and I was able to snatch top gear just before it crested. Staggeringly good.

Now if you want to really wipe the smile off the face of a 911 or M5 driver just ask them how much they get to the gallon. Baleno gets more than both of them put together..ha!

But that's no consolation given how well the BMW or Porsche drive compared to the Suzuki – or is it? Given the narrowness of Lakeland asphalt and the dangers of tourists, drystone walls and potholes I wouldn't have swapped them to be honest. The Baleno is a lot of fun thanks to the brilliant engine, delightful clutch and gearbox, sharp steering and

decent ride. It was also easier on the nerves given that, potentially, repairs of a nasty scrape to either German car could have totalled more than the complete asking price of the Suzuki.

Built in India, Baleno does err on the side of budget but the specification is good and the driving dynamics are excellent. So who is laughing now?

Fact File

- Suzuki Baleno
- Engine: 1.0 three-cylinder petrol
- Power: 112PS
- 0-62mph: 11.4secs
- Top speed: 124mph
- Combined MPG: 62.8
- Transmission: Five-speed manual
- CO2 g/km: 105

