

SUZUKI BRUTE IV

A Half-Pint CJ?



BY BILL SENEFSKY

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER

Before there was the XL-7, the Grand Vitara, the Sidekick, or the Samurai, there was the Brute IV. Actually dubbed the 360 LJ-10, this miniature 3/4-scale version of the famous Jeep CJ was actually



In Japan during the late '60s, there was a small automotive assembler called Hopestar Motors. The company had fashioned a scaled-down version of the world-renowned Jeep CJ utility named the On 360. During the company's 12-month existence, it assembled 50 versions of this tiny platform for the Japanese and Eastern Asian markets. Twenty of these pioneer vehicles were sold in Japan, with 30 others exported to foreign shores.

In 1968, Suzuki purchased the company, including all of the manufacturing patents and rights, redesigned it, and kept Hopestar's two-stroke power concept. Hopestar Motors had used a Mitsubishi ME 24, a 359cc (21.9ci) air-cooled powerplant that produced 21 hp at 5,500 rpm. Suzuki liked this base unit, upgraded the antiquated lubrication system so future owners would have the convenience of not bothering with premixing, and improved the electric system to keep the points from fouling. The improved version also produced 3 more horsepower.

Suzuki debuted the LJ-10 in 1970; it was also referred to as the Jimmy and the Brute IV. The LJ stood for Light Jeep, with Jimmy referring to a language miscommunication after Japanese company delegates visited the Scotland market and decided to call the new platform Jeep Jimmy. The translation came back to Japan as Jimmy. In any case, it was the only mass-produced 4x4 platform in Japan's domestic market, which was strictly regulated with regard to engine size, platform length and width, and vehicle weight.

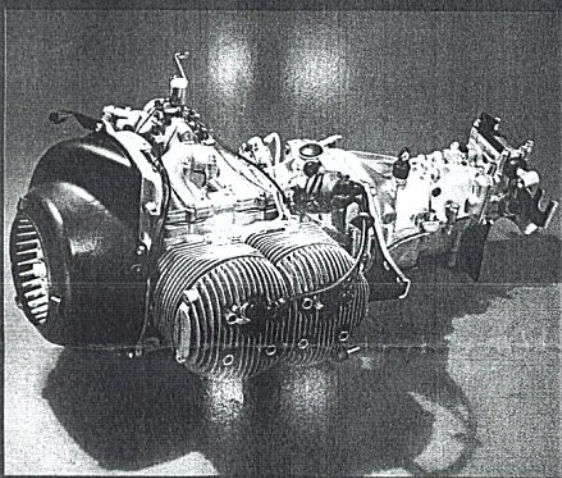
The company initially inked a deal using a private importer/distributor — Intercontinental Equipment of San Diego — in December of 1970. The plan was to target the western mountain areas of the U.S., but in reality, no business was refused, and a few vehicles made it East. Dubbed the Suzuki Brute IV, this utility platform rode on a double-beam-constructed steel frame, with four conventional leaf springs mounted at each corner. Initially imported with righthand drive, its manual rack-and-pinion steering

IV also featured higher engine mounts to prevent damage to important mechanical components. The standard ground clearance of 8-1/2 inches was aided by the 16x6-inch mud and snow tires. Users quickly found that standard five-bolt Jeep wheels provided greater ground clearance with larger tires.

The short overall length (the Brute IV had a 75-inch wheelbase) combined with a 53-inch width provided a platform that rapidly established itself off-road, especially in soft sand and rugged rock terrain. The vehicle was lighter than the majority of dune buggies, with an unloaded weight of 1,320 pounds. Many owners took cues from the buggy crowd and transported these mobile half-pints in the back of their fullsize pickups.

The Brute IV's air-cooled, two-cylinder, two-stroke powerplant delivered 25 hp at 6,000 rpm. The engine featured a parallel twin alternate-firing two-stroke design, with 180-degree opposed crank throws. For the performance buffs, an optional bolt-on hop-up kit boosted the engine output by 6 hp. To say that this engine relied on a flat power curve for torque was a tongue-in-cheek understatement.

Two-strokes were new to the Western market (and the U.S. in particular), but company engineers were confident that problems related to conventional piston-port designs were solved. Suzuki's patented reed-valve design sealed the individual crankcase chambers, thus preventing oil bypass and reducing overlap at low rpm. The posi-force automatic lubrication system eliminated messy premixing by metering oil from a separate 3.7-quart supply proportioned to the throttle opening. Engine cooling was accomplished with an electric impeller fan that moved cooler air over the finned cylinder heads. Brute owners, though surprised, reported that the novel powerplant started easily, smoked only on initial warm-up, and never threatened to seize throughout repeated acceleration runs with wide-open throttle. The engine was vibration-free, silent at idle speed, and provided a



minor exhaust note. The Brute's mileage figures of 28 mpg were unheard of for 4x4s in this time period.

With its flat torque curve and minimal horsepower, the Brute IV relied on gearing and gear selection for motivation. The platform came standard with a full-synchro four-speed manual transmission. With the addition of a transfer case, eight forward gears were now possible. A 2WD hop-out was also standard. Two floor shifters

were used, with the second, shorter floor-mounted unit located directly behind the primary lever, which operated the transfer case. It provided control for the four-wheel Low range, High range, and two-wheel-drive High. The limited engine horsepower allowed the Low and High ranges to be selected while the vehicle was in motion, but the factory recommended that Low-range gears be engaged when stopped. With the Brute, all four forward gears were

generally shifted during the first 40 feet. And although highway speeds were claimed to be in the 60-mph range, reality checks produced +5 mph — going downhill.

In 1970, \$2,195 got the excited Brute buyer a solid and reliable two-passenger off-road utility platform, although a high emphasis had to be placed on the Brute's off-road abilities. The novel platform came equipped with a flexible front plastic grille and a functional fold-down windshield with hood-mounted rubber bumpers; only two bolts needed to be removed to fold the windshield. A 12-volt electrical system included a dynamo/generator. Inside instrument controls included a panel-mounted light switch, two-speed windshield wipers, a wiper/washer switch, a manual choke, a battery charge light, a fuel gauge, a speedometer/odometer, and the important oil indicator light. This light had two functions: pressure monitoring and oil consumption. Always lit, the light got brighter when engine oil was needed. A fullsize spare tire was located behind the left front seat. A jack was also provided. A locking glovebox and a small package tray were included. Like the fullsize Jeep CJ, pop-out rubber drain plugs were mounted in the body floor wells for drainage and interior cleaning. Six-ply snow tires were mounted on 16-inch stamped steel wheels. The short option list initially included the engine hop-up kit, a full-vinyl top with side curtains and removable vinyl doors, a single rollbar mounted behind the front buckets, and a fullsize rear seat. Sales literature of the period show aftermarket painted and slotted wheels as well.

Later versions of the Brute were available with lefthand steering and more color choices in addition to the initial yellow, light blue, and dark-green enamels. It's no secret that emission controls and lack of on-road comfort killed this vehicle in the U.S. However, all concepts have to start somewhere, and the Brute IV led the way for Suzuki to enter and later develop a greater 4x4 presence. **ewp**