

## NEWS - Subaru Leone 4WD Wagon - the first SUV

**There's a current argument between Suzuki and Toyota over who was first to introduce the SUV. The answer is neither of them.**



Suzuki introduced the Vitara to Australia in 1988, with a live rear axle and low-range gearing. The current Grand Vitara has all-independent suspension and retains low-range, and is certainly the most off-road capable small SUV on the market.

Toyota displayed a concept RAV4 at the 1989 Tokyo Motor Show, with live rear axle and low-range gearing, but the first RAV4 did not go on sale until 1994, with all-independent suspension and no low-range.

The Fuji Heavy Industries' Subaru 4WD vehicles were introduced Down Under long before anyone had coined the tag 'SUV'. The Leone 4WD wagon was released in Australia in 1975 and became an instant success.

The first Subaru 4WDs were based on the Leone front wheel drive station wagon platform, using 'boxer' engines. The concept continues today, albeit with much greater sophistication. Owners found that while the little Leone couldn't go every place a 'real' 4WD could go, it satisfied most requirements.

The Leone led to the Touring Wagon and Brumby ute. It also inspired other vehicle makers to embark on the light-duty 4WD journey, to the point where most major vehicle makers now include at least one in their range.

The Brumby was a favourite with bush property owners and we're sure that a modern equivalent would sell very well today.