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Mitsubishi Classics – On the Road Today

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I was recently privileged to be given the opportunity to briefly test drive some of Mitsubishi's Heritage Collection vehicles, which represent some of the most important of the company's cars ever to have been brought to the UK, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Unfortunately the chosen autumnal day was very wet and the roads were slippery, so I deliberately limited my mileage in each vehicle and treated these cared-for classics with all due regard to the conditions and with great respect for the vehicles, all in pristine condition.



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My grateful thanks to Mitsubishi for kindly allowing me to drive their 'priceless' classics...

My Drive No. 1



1987 Mitsubishi Shogun Mark I short wheelbase

I first took out a short wheelbase Mark I Shogun, dating from 1987. The example I drove joined Mitsubishi's Heritage Collection towards the end of 2018, and, following some refurbishment work, was put back on the road early this year.

The last time I drove a similar vehicle was 35 years ago, and it was good to be re-acquainted with the model.

The first series Shoguns were introduced in 1982, and by contrast with the majority of traditional 4×4 machines produced before that time, were deliberately intended to be more



modern in concept 'multi-purpose' vehicles. These still provided all-terrain capabilities for the worst ground conditions, but also incorporated interior treatment, comfort levels and easy on-road handling characteristics more akin to those of an upmarket saloon car of the time.

Available in long wheelbase or short wheelbase form, the Shogun was offered with a 2.6 litre four cylinder petrol engine, or a 2.5 litre turbo diesel motor.

Selectable two or four wheel drive was available to the driver, who could also choose between high or low ratio four wheel drive, enabling the vehicle to cope when conditions demanded the ultimate in go-anywhere abilities.

Automatic freewheeling front hubs were standard equipment too; a real boon for 4x4 drivers at that time.

Equipment levels were comprehensive for the early 1980s, with further standard features including a height-adjustable steering wheel, reclining front seats, fold-down rear seats, a quad speaker stereo radio/cassette player sound system, headlamp washers, a remote fuel cap release lever, a heated rear window with a wash/wipe facility, a reversing lamp, a rear fog light and a low fuel warning lamp.

Buyers also had the peace of mind of a three year unlimited mileage warranty.

The 'as new' bright red test vehicle I drove this week felt exactly the same way as I remember the 1984 test car, in which I covered many miles both on and off road, in a special '4x4' feature for 'Practical Motorist' magazine. Back then I rated the Shogun very highly, and during the magazine's demanding test regime, it performed admirably on tarmac and in truly awful conditions of mud and deep water, also including slippery slopes both up and down.

During my drive in the 1987 example, I found that its 2.6 litre petrol engine was a willing and torquey unit, with strong pulling power available from low engine speeds - a



characteristic that, together with the substantial towing capacity of the vehicle, endeared the model to many buyers in need of a vehicle for carrying or towing heavy loads. I also remember this aspect from my drive in the 1984 test car that I drove more than three decades ago!

I was also impressed (once again) by the Shogun's comfortable front seats and the vehicle's smooth on-road performance. The engine ran quietly and cruised happily at all normal road speeds, while the five speed manual gearbox featured an easy-action slick gearchange.

I did not, of course, subject this pristine classic vehicle to any off-road use, but from my previous experience of the model would be confident that it would still drive 'anywhere' with its excellent off-road credentials and tough two/four wheel drive and high/low ratio four wheel drive transmission system.

I was also pleasantly surprised at how accommodating the suspension was, and how easy the vehicle was to steer, even at low speeds.

The interior was 'state of the art' in the 1980s, and although the unashamedly angular design contrasts markedly with the more complex interiors of today, I found that it was refreshingly straightforward in the way it was set out, with easily-assimilated instrumentation and switchgear, and all the controls were effective and easy to use.



I have always been a fan of the Shogun's clean, sharp-edged exterior styling, and again thought that it looked just right on this beautiful bright red example.

Shoguns were deservedly renowned and respected for their inherent toughness and dependability. Back in June 1984 I talked to a man who, at that time, spent the summer months towing huge new caravans/mobile homes from the north of England to the south of France, returning with older examples going back to the UK. He told me that despite the mega-mileages involved and the heavy weights being towed, the Shogun he drove was 100 per cent reliable...



VERDICT

For me it was wonderful to drive an early Shogun again, and the experience was just as impressive as I had remembered it to be from 1984.





Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

1987 Mitsubishi Shogun Mark I, Short Wheelbase.

Engine and transmission:

Four cylinder petrol engine, 2.6 litres (2,555 cc).

Maximum power: 108 bhp. Maximum torque 147 lb.ft (199 Nm) @ 3,000 rpm.

Five speed manual gearbox, selectable two/four wheel drive and high/low ratio four wheel drive.

Max speed: 87 mph.

Kerb weight: 1,473 kg (3,247 lb).

Towing capacity: 2,800 kg (6,173 lb).

My Drive No. 2



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1974 Mitsubishi Colt Lancer 1.4

My next drive was in a 1974 Colt Lancer that is a particularly significant vehicle for the company, as it was THE original press car for Mitsubishi Motors in the UK (formerly known as the Colt Car Company), and it also featured at several motor shows during its early years.

The car I drove has a 1.4 litre petrol engine, but buyers could alternatively choose 1.2 litre or 1.6 litre units; they could also choose between three and five door bodywork.

The original sales brochure for the model states, "The Colt Lancer is a totally new motoring



experience. As lean and agile as a cat, Colt Lancer has a tight, sporty feel to it that can turn an ordinary drive into an adventure”.

The Lancers were also particularly well-equipped for their time, and represented good value for buyers’ hard-earned cash (as were the models sold in Britain from all the Japanese manufacturers in the 1970s). This helped to encourage buyers to take a close look at the Lancer. The sticker still in the rear window of the car I drove briefly this week reads, ‘Move up to a Colt’...

Standard equipment included... a tilt-adjustable steering wheel, collapsible steering column, radio, clock, padded dash panel, reversing and hazard warning lamps, reclining bucket-type front seats, head restraints, two speed screen wipers, a heated rear window, power-assisted brakes, radial ply tyres and dash warning lamps to indicate ‘handbrake on’ and ‘door open’.



I had never driven a Lancer until this week, and was impressed by the strong performance provided by the 1.4 litre engine; in 1974 96 bhp was pretty good indeed for a motor of that relatively modest capacity. It pulled strongly too from reasonably low engine revs, and cruised happily and quietly at normal main road speeds.

The four speed manual gearbox was a model of its type too - slick-acting and precise.

I found the driving seat and ride quality to be comfortable, especially for a car of this Lancer's age.



While, unsurprisingly, the vinyl-trimmed interior, dash layout and switchgear etc. appears 'dated' by comparison with the cars of today, when more fairly compared with contemporary models from 45 years ago, the Lancer looks very good indeed. I soon found my way around the various controls/switches (most of which were dash-mounted rather than on the steering column).

VERDICT

It is no surprise to me that the neat-looking Lancer was well-received in the UK in the 1970s by potential buyers who soon took to the Mitsubishi range of vehicles in increasing numbers, enabling the company to gain a firm foothold in the British market.

The historic two door example that I drove impressed in so many ways, and I enjoyed my drive in the car.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

1974 Mitsubishi Colt Lancer.

Engine and transmission:

Four cylinder petrol engine, 1.4 litres.

Maximum power: 92 bhp. Maximum torque 90.4 lb.ft (123 Nm) @ 4,000 rpm.

Five speed manual gearbox, selectable two/four wheel drive and high/low ratio four wheel drive.



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Max speed: 96 mph.

Kerb weight: 810 kg (1,786 lb).

Towing capacity: 800 kg (1,764 lb).

My Drive No. 3



1987 Mitsubishi Starion 2-door Body

The turbocharged 2.0 litre Starion has long been regarded by enthusiasts as a classic in its own time.

The example I drove was registered in 1987, and personally I feel that it looks as good today as it did 32 years ago, especially with its specific styling features of the retractable headlamps nestling neatly within the front bodywork, and with the extended wings amply surrounding the wide sports aluminium alloy road wheels.

It was a powerful machine for a 1980s vehicle, with the four cylinder overhead camshaft



engine delivering 177 bhp at 6,000 rpm, and a substantial maximum torque figure of 290 Nm (214 lb.ft) at 3,500 rpm.

This translates into eager performance at all speeds, with a rest to 60 mph acceleration time of just 6.6 seconds (especially rapid for a car of the 1980s) and a top speed capability of 147 mph.

I soon settled into the supportive and comfortable sports type driver's seat and, despite pouring rain, for several miles enjoyed the happy song of the turbocharged engine as it worked its magic.

I liked the smooth-acting five speed manual gearbox, and was wowed too by the clarity of the comprehensive instrumentation (especially the speedometer, unmistakably marked in 10 mph increments). The centrally-positioned turbo boost gauge reminded drivers of the 1980s (and those of today) that this was a special high performance car.

It's worth mentioning too that for company on long trips around three decades ago, the four speaker sound system (still fitted) offered a push-button stereo radio station and cassette playback. This car also features such standard-fit niceties as a tilt-adjustable leather-trimmed steering wheel, a clock, reclining front seats with head restraints, fold-down rear seats, electrically-operated front windows, remote control door mirrors, automatic cruise control, retractable headlamps, and remote interior controls for the hatchback tailgate release and the petrol filler cap release. Such a list of standard fittings was longer than usual for most cars, even sporty models, in the 1980s.

In view of the fact that the roads were extremely slippery during my test drive, and out of respect for this superb condition modern classic, I did not test the performance or handling aspects anywhere near the car's limits. However, my passenger and I were impressed by the dynamic performance of the vehicle and liked the surprisingly supple ride quality. We both found the drive exciting enough without having to push harder.



VERDICT

No wonder this is a sought-after and highly regarded model. This well-equipped, comfortable and fast-for-its-time classic Mitsubishi is a terrific looking car and great fun to drive. Now sadly I don't have room in my garage for one of these but there's no harm in dreaming, is there?



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:



1987 Mitsubishi Starion Wide-Body Turbo .

Engine and transmission:

Four cylinder, overhead camshaft 'Silent Shafts' (twin balancer shafts) petrol engine, 2.0 litres, turbocharged and intercooled.

Maximum power: 177 bhp @ 6,000 rpm.

Maximum torque: 214 lb.ft (290 Nm) @ 3,500 rpm.

Five speed manual gearbox, rear wheel drive.

0 - 60 mph: 6.6 secs.

Max speed: 147 mph.

Kerb weight: 1,280 kg (2,822 lb).

Towing capacity: 1,200 kg (2,646 lb).