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Mitsubishi Eclipse Cross – First impressions

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Chris Adamson samples the latest Mitsubishi...

Car sales in the UK dropped by almost six per cent last year but one sector that actually saw an increase was the Sport Utility which continues to grow in popularity thanks to its versatility and design ethos.

One of the first brands to exploit this sector was Mitsubishi (who built their first four-by-four in 1936) – its Shogun/Pajero launched in 1982 has already reached iconic status and, today, the Japanese marque has a broad selection of SUV models in its showroom.

Just arriving to make it a magnificent seven is the two and four-wheel drive Eclipse Cross



that slots in between the ASX and Outlander and will do battle with some of the leading soft-roaders in the marketplace such as the Kia Sportage, Hyundai Tucson, Seat Altea, Peugeot 3008 and the class-leading Nissan Qashqai, which was the fifth best-selling car in the UK in 2017.

Mitsubishi is hoping the Eclipse Cross will make an impact in this crowded market with three key core elements: Sharp design, cool technology and driving dynamics.

The first is supplied by highly sculptured bodywork that is likely to polarise opinions with the use of strong visual images starting with the high impact front end comprising a class standard high bonnet and large grille, set-off with deep corner edge inserts that give it a very dramatic stance.

In side profile the Eclipse has a strong and deliberate coupé-like appearance with both the waistline and roof line rising to almost meet at the rear – this may also be in part a homage to the original Mitsubishi Eclipse which was a sports couple built in the USA between 1989 and 2011.

This silhouette is the feature that to my mind has the least impact and follows the current trend in SUVs but it does contain one of my favourite features – bottom door trims that wrap under the side sills which mean that the interior sills remain free from mud and grime.

One of my pet hates about off-roaders is stepping out to find the back of your trouser leg smeared in dirt. Although not unique to Mitsubishi this is a simple feature that is really appreciated.

The rear-end is the area likely to divide opinions, much like the split rear window with cross beam containing the LED brake-light that the designer has chosen to install. I hated the concept on the Honda Civic and am still not a fan both for the aesthetics and the practicality of broken rear vision.

Continuing the coupé theme the roof line not only sweeps down, it also curves inwards so



that the Eclipse has a slightly ungainly bottom heavy appearance. I'm not a fan but I know others who think it is fresh and different.

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The multi section hatch lifts up to reveal a class-competitive luggage space that will swallow between 348 and 448 litres (12.29 and 15.82 litres) with the sliding rear seats in the upright position, and depending on where they are set and reclined.

While the seats themselves are solid and comfortable, their bulk and no downward movement of the squab means that the seats don't go anywhere near flat, which is a practical disappointment. Mitsubishi's official figures quote a maximum load space of 653 litres (23.06 cu.ft) but that feels way too low and in reality is likely to be over 1,000 litres (35.31 cu.ft).

Up front, the wrap-around cockpit is very much driver-oriented and the use of a silver spar across the dashboard gives it a strong dynamic appeal. The textured plastics and a use of a variety of other materials works quite well to give it a solid and well-constructed atmosphere.

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Its promise of cool technology is fulfilled by not only a large central touch screen but also a touch pad (used to scroll between aspects on the screen) located on the central console ahead of the large and high set manual parking brake.

I have to hold my hand up to admit I am not a great fan of all this high tech ancillary wizardry, I find much of it distracting for the driver and having to concentrate on moving your hands between different elements and turn your eyes away from the road ahead is a major safety hazard.

However, I will admit that features such as Apple Car Play, Smartphone link and Android



Auto with Google maps (and Siri where you can give the car voice instructions) are items that the younger generation expect in their cars these days so Mitsubishi has to provide them.

Purchasers have the choice from four basic trim levels:

The entry Cross 2 grade is far from basic with items such as Smartphone audio and Apple CarPlay, rear view camera, Bluetooth, touch pad controller, cruise control, climate control, automatic headlights and wipers, Front Collision Mitigation, Lane Departure warning and privacy glass.

However most owners are likely to upgrade to the Cross 3 or Cross 4, the former adding in items such as heads-up display, heated front seats, dual zone climate control, keyless entry and start, soundproof windscreen and front and rear parking sensors.

Top grade models get a nine speaker Rockford sound system, black leather, a powered opening panoramic glass sunroof, LED headlamps, a 360 degree camera, Bling Sport warning, Rear Cross Traffic alert and adaptive cruise control.

There is also a limited First Edition model featuring a new premium red paint scheme but most are already sold.

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On the Road

Underpinning the Eclipse Cross is a basic chassis inherited from the popular Outlander but with lots of additional strengthening to this and the body shell which makes for a surprisingly rigid package in a relatively modest sized SUV.

One of the stand out features is the installation of a sophisticated and forgiving multi-link rear suspension (rivals often opt for a twist beam arrangement). This makes the vehicle one



of the best riding and handling I have experienced in this sector with little body roll.

It soaks up a lot of punishment from the road so there is little pot-hole crashing and it sits firmly on the road without getting uncomfortable, all achieved with minimal road noise.

A new power assisted steering system works very well with a quick rack for positive direct response to input and the weighting on turning is just how I like it, firm but not heavy.

Eclipse Cross arrives in the UK with just one engine option; a new all-aluminium one and a half litre turbocharged direct injection petrol delivering 163 PS and 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) of torque.



While perfectly acceptable in power delivery (62 mph in 10.3 seconds for the manual) the unit is disappointing on two fronts, economy and emissions. Mitsubishi quote an average return of 42 mpg but in a mixed conditions journey, and without being a hooligan, I managed only 34.4 mpg.

On the increasingly scrutinised CO2 emissions the figure of 151 g/km means there is going to be quite a hit on road tax (£500) in the early life of the vehicle.

Mitsubishi executives say they are currently evaluating the addition of a diesel to the range for the UK and there is the option to fit a petrol electric motor combination which is also



being considered.

Buyers have the choice of a six-speed manual transmission or an eight-speed CVT automatic.

The stick shift has a nice easy action and the low speed torque delivery means that it will actually crawl along in sixth, but when you want to put your foot down the response can be a bit sluggish at times and careful gear selection is needed.

Seeing the words CVT in relation of automatics often sets alarm bells ringing – the ‘old technology’ with its clunky changes is not favoured these days. However Mitsubishi seems to have overcome the traditional defects in the system and produced a unit that is both responsive and smooth and it has the option of a sport mode and paddle levers for manual selection between gears.

Ultimately the automatic should take the lion’s share of sales.

Apart from trim levels the only other choice for buyers is two (front-wheel) or four-wheel drive, the latter only available with the auto box. Initially sales have been 50-50 but price considerations and the rare off-road excursions are likely to make the two-wheel drive the more popular.

In normal driving conditions it is hard to tell the pair apart, the four-wheel drive (with Super-All Wheel Control and Yaw Control) just feeling a fraction heavier and slightly stiffer at the rear with the suggestion of a touch more road noise but nothing oppressive.

Unless you are expecting to encounter lots of snow or very slippery conditions (where film footage suggests the 4×4 will be more than at home using the auto, snow and gravel settings) the two-wheel drive will be more than adequate.



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Verdict

In an increasingly busy and competitive SUV market Mitsubishi has an enviable track record and the Eclipse Cross does nothing to harm this. It looks and feels the part, it's competitively priced starting at just over £21,000 and rising to almost £30,000, has some clever features and best of all is among the class leaders when it comes to ride quality and handling.

Wheels-Alive Tech Spec. in Brief:



Mitsubishi Eclipse Cross 4 2WD Manual.

Engine: 1499cc turbo petrol

Transmission: Six-speed manual

Power: 163 PS @ 5,000 rpm

Torque: 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) @ 1,800-4,500 rpm

Performance:

0-62 mph: 10.3 seconds

Top Speed: 127mph

Fuel Consumption (Official Figures):

Urban: 34.4 mpg

Extra-Urban: 49.6 mpg

Combined: 42.8 mpg

CO2 Emissions: 151 g/km

Price (On the Road): £24,975