Mitsubishi ASX Road Test

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LATEST MITSUBISHI ASX COMPACT CROSSOVER ADDS TO SALES GROWTH

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency)

Since 1983 Mitsubishi have been well known for their off-roaders, starting with the tough and durable Shogun three and five door range, winner of the Dakar rally for numerous years. But times change as customer's buying requirements alter due to the higher rates of tax imposed to force down CO2 emissions. Although the Shogun continues, today's 4×4 range hero is their slightly smaller Outlander diesel and in particular the Outlander PHEV plug in petrol electric hybrid. Also in their SUV armoury Mitsubishi have the compact ASX crossover with the latest EU6 compliant petrol and diesel engine options.

The Outlander PHEV has played a significant role in the resurrection of the popularity of the Japanese brand and currently they are on track in the UK to being the fastest growing mainstream manufacturer for the third year running.

Briefing members of the motoring media recently, Toby Marshall, Mitsubishi UK's director of sales and marketing said the Outlander – which created the UK plug-in hybrid market –outsells all other hybrid and plug-in hybrids, and should achieve 13,000 sales this year – plus another 3,500 diesel versions will add to the tally.

The Outlander's success for Mitsubishi is backed up by the industry's best selling L200 Double Cab pick-up range which is expected to attract up to 9,000 sales this, an increase of 30% so far this year. The latest ASX compact SUV styled crossover models will achieve 6,000 registrations with demand already up by 23%. The long-serving Shogun should still achieve 2,500 registrations and this shows an increase of 65% in UK sales this year. The small Mirage hatchback range will weigh in with another 2,500 sales, he said.

With their revised range, currently Mitsubishi's new vehicles sales are up by 52% in a market up by 6%. If this growth continues Mitsubishi should more than double last year's UK sales total.

The Mitsubishi ASX five door 4/5-seater compact crossover was first introduced in 2010 with over 700,000 sold worldwide. It competes against the sector's best selling Nissan

Qashqai and the Kia Sportage, Hyundai ix35/Tucson, Skoda Yeti, Renault Kadjar, Honda HR-V, Peugeot 3008 and the Suzuki Vitara.

The new ASX range, introduced in July, offers the choice of three EU6 engines. These are Mitsubishi's own 1.6-petrol 115bhp unit and a 2.2-litre 147bhp turbodiesel unit from the Outlander range. New to the line-up, replacing Mitsubishi's previous 1.8-litre turbodiesel is a 1.6-litre 112bhp turbodiesel sourced from PSA Peugeot-Citroen.

The 1.6 petrol unit has a five speed gearbox and 2WD, the new 1.6 turbodiesel a six-speed gearbox with 2WD or 4WD models and the 2.2 turbodiesel has a six-speed auto transmission and 4WD as standard. For the next generation ASX range a PHEV plug-in electric petrol hybrid powertrain, similar to that used with the Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV, will be part of the line-up.

Depending on the current engine chosen, there are new levels of specification that, added to the ASX prefix, now looks like a Scrabble board. Gone are the logical ASX 2, 3 and 4 levels and in have come ASX ZC, ZC-M and ZC-H. Prices start at £15,249 for the 1.6 petrol 2WD and rise to £24,899 for the 2.2 diesel auto 4WD. The most popular new 1.6 diesel models, all manuals, start at £19,499 for the 2WD version and go up to £23,499 for the top spec 4WD model. Food for thought though – this pricing structure means that for an extra £1,400 you can buy a more powerful 2.2-litre diesel with a desirable automatic gearbox and 4WD which makes the new 1.6-litre diesel manual 4WD look expensive, but its saving grace is lower running costs.

To get to grips with the latest ASX I have just had a week-long driving spell with ZC-H spec level with the new 1.6 litre turbodiesel engine with its manual six-speed gearbox and push-button operated 4WD system – which gives 2WD, 4WD auto and 4WD Lock modes. This model is priced at £23,499, which is £200 more than the corresponding outgoing version with the old 1.8-litre turbodiesel engine.

The new 1.6-litre turbodiesel engine with the 4WD option will officially return 56.5mpg in

the Combined Cycle with CO2 emissions of 132g/km which means VED road tax is £130. As a comparison the same engine with 2WD is 61.4mpg, 119g/km and VED at £0 First Year and £30 Year Two onwards. It is £2,800 less to buy but only comes with the lower ZC-M spec level but it does have leather upholstery. It is a sales fact that most customers in this compact crossover sector opt for 2WD models over those with 4WD because of the price differentials. They like the status of SUV styling but see no need to spend extra on 4WD traction.

However, Mitsubishi's long-standing customers are well known for their love of 4x4s having bought thousands of Shogun, Shogun Sports, Shogun Pinins, L200s and now ASX models in the past. So I see the ASX 1.6 4WD being a popular version, certainly in rural areas such as The Cotswolds where I live. There are lots of them being used for family and business purposes and quite a few of them by the farming community. And to be practical the 4WD modern lightweight systems do not really detract from the fuel economy in an alarming manner. My week long test driving saw 55.7mpg for longer 70mph motorway trips, 40mpg as a minimum for short commuter journeys with an overall average for the week of 50.4mpg, which given the substantial, tough and rugged nature of the ASX, impressed me.

The 112bhp power output figure might look modest from the 1.6 turbodiesel engine but the high 270Nm of torque from 1,750rpm with six well spaced gear ratios gave strong lateral power delivery. This made the engine very responsive for acceleration in the mid range and flexible at lower speeds. It was also very capable of being driven at low speeds in higher fuel saving gear ratios. The engine can be noisy under acceleration but I suspect this is down to poor insulation between the engine bay and the cabin. Top speed is 111mph and zero to 62mph takes 11.5-seconds. It's not impressively fast but it is reliably gutsy for the all-important mid-range driving speeds and it has really good fuel economy potential.

In terms of handling, the raised suspension does give some cornering body roll but not much. There seemed to be plenty of high speed cornering grip even in 2WD mode and of course 4WD mode gives a better handling balance around bends in wet weather as the system automatically shifts torque as required between the front and rear wheels.

Off road the ASX is very capable and hard to bring to a halt in tough conditions, thanks to the easily selected 4WD Lock mode. The on-road ride is comfortable and the suspension compliant, the steering lacked enough feedback but was constant with its assistance and the brakes were strong and well balanced.

Although the ASX crossover uses the same platform as the former Lancer Evolution models, it is not really just a 'jacked-up' tall hatchback. Yes it has four passenger doors and a rear tailgate like a hatchback car but with a blunt nose and its tall suspension it looks like a proper SUV.





There is no sleek coupé side profile to reduce the headroom in the rear and the rear seat space is ample enough in this mid-sized sector. There are split folding seats in the rear, with a 26-litre underfloor compartment in the boot where the spare wheel should be – but you

only get an inflation kit. For a SUV/crossover vehicle a space saver spare wheel is definitely a requirement. The boot offers a capacity of 442 litres with the rear seats in position but fold them down seats and the load area goes up to 1,193 litres. The braked towing weight for this model is 1,400 kg (3,086 lb).

Apart from not offering a spare wheel the specification of the ASX is good. Even the lowest spec. version has aluminium alloy wheels, air conditioning, active stability and traction control, remote keyless entry, seven airbags, daytime running lights, fog lights and electrically operated windows and door mirrors. The spec. levels increase up to the version I tried and the additions include leather upholstery, panoramic glass sunroof with LED mood lighting, Mitsubishi's Multi Communication system which includes a 7.0-inch touchscreen, sat-nav, DAB radio and reversing camera. All good stuff except the touchscreen is fiddly to use.

Another disappointment was the quality of the interior plastics. These latest models have improved over the previous versions but some of the trim is hard and is prone to scratch marks. My test car, although almost new, had noticeable marks on the passenger side front door trim and the same side lower fascia panel. This grade of trim might be chosen to be durable but it needs improving to catch up with the newest competition, for instance the Renault Kadjar and the Honda HR-V.

Despite its small number of niggling faults the latest Mitsubishi ASX compact crossover is a tough and I'm sure mechanically durable vehicle. It might not be as nimble on the road as some of its more car-like crossover competitors, but with the 4WD option it offers owners almost guaranteed on and off-road driving security in winter weather.



VERDICT

For: A typical Mitsubishi; strong, rugged, practical 4×4, good real-life fuel economy, high specification, good on and off road abilities, comfortable.

Against: Still some cheap look/feel interior plastic trim prone to scratches, no cheaper lower spec. option with the new 1.6-litre engine and 4WD, fiddly to use touchscreen, no spare wheel.

MILESTONES AND WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF:

Mitsubishi ASX, Compact Crossover, ZC-H, 1.6 turbodiesel, 4WD manual.

Engine: 1.6-litre, 4-cylinder, direct injection turbodiesel, 112bhp, 270Nm of torque from 1,750rpm.

Transmission: 6-speed manual, 4WD.

Performance:

0-62mph: 11.5-seconds

Top speed: 111mph

Fuel consumption: 56.5mpg Combined Cycle (50.4mpg on test).

CO2 emssions: 132g/km, VED road tax £130, BIK company car tax 24%.

Insurance group: 18E.

Warranty: 5-years/62,500-miles.

Dimensions/capacities: 5-doors, 4-5 seats, L 4,295 mm (14.1 ft), W 1,810 mm (5.9 ft), H 1,625 mm (5.3 ft), boot/load space 442 to 1,193 litres, braked towing weight 1,400 kg (3,086 lb).

Price: £23,499.


ASX
4WD