

Road beat: Lancer slays the competition



Mitsubishi is turing out quality vehicles. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

If you haven't noticed, Mitsubishi is growing with total 2015 sales at about 100,000 vehicles, a sales growth of more than 22 percent, making it one of the fastest growing car companies in the United States. And 2016 is on a pace to exceed those record numbers. And they are making money.

Worldwide, Mitsubishi is huge. And the new Lancer is part of the reason. Dollar for dollar it is hard to get more car for the money.

After spending a week with the Lancer it's a wonder why Mitsubishi sales aren't growing faster. The 2016 Lancer's

shape has been in production for several years, and it is still quite the looker with its Concept-X shark nose, but it is slightly softened in its new form. It is still an aggressive, stylish design that still looks great. Its dimensions are pure compact, 104-inch wheelbase, 182-inches long, 69-inches wide and 58-inches high. Track is wide at 60 inches.



Specifications

Price \$21,995 plus \$810 for the boat ride from Japan

Engine

2.4L DOHC, 16 valve inline four cylinder 168 hp @ 6,000 rpm

167 ft.-lbs. of torque @ 4,100 rpm

Transmission

CVT

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 103.7 inches

Length 180 inches

Width 69.4 inches

Height 58.7 inches

Track (f/r) 60.2/60.2 inches

Ground clearance 5.8 inches
Weight 3,142 pounds
Weight distribution (f/r)
59/41percent
Fuel tank 14.5 gallons
Trunk capacity 12.3 cubic
feet
Wheels 16X7 inch alloys
Tires 205/60X16 all season
Steering lock to lock 3.16
turns
Turning circle 32.8 feet

Performance

0-60 mph 7.39 seconds
50-70 mph 4.59 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 7.77
seconds
Top Speed Don't even
consider finding out unless
on a race track
Fuel economy EPA rated at
23/31/26 mpg city/highway
combined. Expect 33-34 mpg
on the highway at legal
speeds and about 28 mpg
overall.

Under the hood is the Global Alliance engine jointly developed by Chrysler, Hyundai and Mitsubishi of 2.4L, four cylinders in line, DOHC and 16 valves with electronic variability. It develops 168 hp at 6,000 rpm and a strong 167 pounds of twist at 4,100 rpm. It is a bit of a torque monster. Now here is where it gets good by offering something only found in one other compact made by Subaru. Mitsu employs a CVT tranny that drives not only the front wheels, but with a switch can drive all four wheels either on demand or all four locked up. In this model its standard equipment. How terrific is that?

And it works great. During a little excursion into 6 inches of snow, absolutely no problems, real surefootedness. It's also nice in heavy rain. Handling is also enhanced with its advanced fully independent suspension, something not found in most compact sedans. Steering is a hydraulic rack and pinion, albeit a bit slow, but feel is good. It's also shod with 205/60 series rubber, nothing special there, but the 16 inch alloys are great looking. With stab bars at both ends, handling is quite sporty with limited roll, great steering feel and decent turn-in. Turning circle is a tight 33 feet. Lancer AWC (All Wheel Control) is one of the better handling compacts. It prefers aggressive driving; so will the driver appreciate the extra fun built into the Lancer.

Performance is also near the top of the compact class sprinting to 60 mph 7.39 seconds. Ditto for 50-70 mph passing runs. On level ground it takes 4.59 seconds and up a six percent grade will extend that time to 7.77 seconds, clearly all times at least a second quicker than your average compact. Since peak torque arrives at a low 4,100 rpm, midrange response is outstanding for a compact. There is something here that isn't found in most other compacts, fun, performance and AWD. Remember that the Lancer is the basis for one of the great hyper-performance cars ever and well known for its rallying capability, the Mitsubishi (Lancer) Evolution, a turbocharged AWD monster with 300 plus hp.

If you are looking for maximum fuel economy look elsewhere, perhaps the base Mitsu Lancer 2.0L which still packs a 148 hp punch should deliver about 4 mpg more than this more performance oriented AWD sport model for a lot less money. My tester delivered 28 mpg overall and 33 mpg at 70 mph on the highway. In a round trip from Rescue to Pollock Pines it averaged 28.6 mpg. EPA rates this Lancer at 23/31/26 mpg city/highway/combined. Fuel capacity is 14.5 gallons.

Of course braking is all wheel discs and their performance is excellent in arresting forward progress stopping the Mitsu in

a near benchmark 41-42 feet. The pedal is firm and strong. Of course there are a plethora of airbags and electronic interventions such as ABS, VSC, TC along with a whole alphabet soup of electronic safety devices. That kind of high tech electronic intervention is now on every new car, even back up cameras.

Inside this Mitsu is a leather interior, seats, steering wheel, shift knob and more. It has some luxury touches making it a notch above your average compact and it's all standard. There is nothing extra to purchase with the SEL. Even the door paneling and dash are soft touch. Seats are comfortable and rear seating is good for two six footers. Instrumentation is also complete with a large standard tach and speedo in dual cowl binnacle which is becoming a bit dated. The trip computer is complete as well. This is a quality car.



Performance in snow is not a problem.

Spinning at 2,400 rpm at 70 mph gives the Mitsu a relaxed feel on the highway and road noise seems to be a bit subdued for a compact.

So here's the deal, this very well equipped, AWD, top of the line Mitsu Lancer stickers for just \$21,995, plus \$810 for the boat from Kurashiki, Japan. It needs nothing. Even the embroidered carpeted floors mats are standard. This is about the most car you can get for the money in a compact. And it is

All Wheel Drive. It is a real value. Perhaps that's the reason for Mitsubishi's sales growth, making it one of the fastest growing auto companies in the business. People are finding out that nothing sells like real value. What's even better is you can buy a Mitsubishi Lancer ES AWC for about \$20 large. Don't forget that all Mitsubishi's come with a standard 5 year/60K mile bumper to bumper warranty plus a 10 year/100K mile powertrain warranty.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.