

Road Beat: Mitsubishi Outlander Sport deserves a look



The 2018 Mitsubishi Outlander Sport is bound to surprise a lot of people. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

After spending a week in the new, much improved Mitsubishi Outlander and being impressed with its polish, remarkable performance out of a 2.4L four banger, good fuel economy, good looks and excellent value, it was only understandable to want to put the smaller Outlander Sport through its paces and a thorough wringing out. The bottom line reveals a top flite CUV.

Outside is a very attractive shape that has a bit of a luxury

look with bright metal in all the right places. While the design is simple, its proportions are perfect, and its massive and strong front end give it an athletic look. The window line is graceful. Yes, it doesn't take many chances with add-ons and wasted lines, and simplicity works here.

It received many positive comments, especially from those who didn't know it was a Mitsubishi. When getting into the Mitsu at a local Micky D's, one gentleman asked me what it was as he gave it the once over and said he was definitely going to drive one and add it to his shortlist. I remarked he won't be disappointed. He was impressed.

Remember Mitsubishi only sells about 100,000 cars annually in the U.S., but that number is growing as more people discover the value of the brand.



Specifications

Engine

2.4L MIVEC, DOHC, 16 valve inline four cylinder (SE, SEL) 168 hp @ 6,000
167 lb.-ft. of torque @ 4,100 rpm

Transmission

CVT

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/FWD/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 105.1 inches

Length 171.9 inches

Width 71.3 inches

Height 64.8 inches

Ground clearance 8.5 inches

Track (f/r) 60.6/60.6 inches

Weight 3,285 pounds

GVWR 4,343 pounds

Weight distribution (f/r)

59/41 percent

Fuel capacity 15.8 gallons

Cargo capacity (Rear seats up/down) 21.7/49.5 cubic feet

Wheels 18X7 inches

Tires 225/55X18

Turning circle 34.8 feet

Steering lock to lock 3.3 turns

Performance

0-60 mph 7.71 seconds

50-70 mph 4.26 seconds

50-70 mph (uphill 6-7%) 7.81 seconds

Top speed Does anyone care?

Fuel economy EPA rated at 23/28/25 mpg

city/highway/combined.

Expect 25-27 mpg in rural/country/suburban driving and 32 mpg on a level highway at legal speeds.

As to the nuts and bolts of the Outlander Sport, it is quite similar to the larger, compact size Outlander (185 inches in

length). The Sport is essentially a sub-compact built on the Outlander chassis, only losing an inch in wheelbase (105 inches), but about 13 inches in length at 172 inches. Width remain an identical 71 inches and track is also identical at a wide 61 inches, making the Outlander Sport a truncated version of the Outlander (and about 250 pounds lighter), and that's a good thing unless you need that third row of seats or more cargo volume. The only other major difference is the availability of the fine Mitsu 3.0L V-6 in the Outlander which also adds about 60 hp, although the standard power for the Outlander is the same 2.4L four banger that came with my Sport. And as you will see the four banger will surprise you.

Speaking of the world engine (which is used by at least two other major manufacturers), the 2.4L MIVEC, DOHC, 16 valve four-cylinder engine, it puts out 168 hp at 6,000 rpm and 167 pounds of twist at 4,100 rpm. There is no V-6 option and maybe it doesn't need it. Power is sent via a CVT to either the front wheels and in the AWC version (as was my tester) to all four wheels when selected by a push button on the center console or with a second push of the button to all four wheels locked up, a nice feature when the going gets seriously tough. Unless you are upside down, this system will pull you out of most trouble. And if it doesn't, you shouldn't have been there in the first place.

Performance for this Sport is quite sprightly, with an average 0-60 mph time of 7.71 seconds. When you compare that to a 1957 Dodge D-500 5.2L 285 hp, V-8 muscle car, this Mitsu is a rocket as the so-called D-500 muscle car 0-60 mph time was 8.7 seconds. Throttle response is strong with the CVT and there are times when power will build beyond your expectations which will give you a sort of "wow" feeling.

Passing times are also good with a 50-70 mph level pass taking just 4.26 seconds with the gear selector in Ds, which improves the vehicle's responsiveness and up a steep grade that time slows to 7.81 seconds. All good times. As with its bigger

brother, the Outlander, the Sport performs better than the numbers promise. How nice is that?

Fuel economy is about middle of the pack with an EPA rating of 23/28/25 mpg city/highway/combined. Overall is rural, suburban and country driving the Sport averaged between 25-28 mpg depending on how aggressive I was driving and because the throttle was a bit delicious, it was hard to stay out of it, so 25-26 mpg was more the norm. On the highway at 70 mph on cruise control the Sport averaged 32.8 mpg in a two-way run. In my round trip run from Placerville to Carson City the average was 29.3 mpg which was about an mpg less than the larger Outlander, yet the smaller Sport returned about one mpg better than the bigger Outlander in the 70-mph highway test. That might be attributable to that delicious throttle again. Fuel capacity is 15.8 gallons, bigger would be better.

Handling is also very good with state of the art suspension, stab bars at both ends, 18 x 7 inch alloys shod with quiet 225/55 tires and a tight 35 foot turning radius. About the only thing missing is quicker steering which in the Outlander and Sport's case is 3.3 turns lock to lock. Three turns would be better. However, don't worry as the Sport goes around corners like water in a hose and handling is very sporty with little roll, oodles of grip and accurate steering. With the Sport you will take the long and windy road option when available. Holding overall weight to under 3,300 pounds benefits Sport's ability to change directions, performance and fuel economy above.

Ride quality is excellent, and my passengers noted the quiet and lack of engine, wind and road noise adding to its overall smoothness. Engine speed is a low 2,050 rpm at 70 mph and inaudible. Head tossing is minimal, and it handles bumps with aplomb.

My loaded Sport SEL came with the Touring package (\$2,000) which added forward collision warning, lane departure warning

and automatic high beams. These features add to the full compliment of acronyms and large four-wheel discs were quite strong. LED Headlights were excellent on low beam and very good on (halogen) high beam.

Inside is a leather interior (SEL model) that has firm, but quite comfortable heated front seats. Since it is the same width as the bigger Outlander, it feels spacious inside. Appointments, dash, doors, console and switchgear are all top quality. Mitsu does a nice job. The steering wheel is leather, and the steering switches are well done and easy to use.

The center console is almost identical to the Outlander and the touch screen system is one of the best while the HVAC is done by knobs and buttons as it should be. Special mention should be made of the trick fuel computer in the 7-inch touch screen.

Cargo volume is excellent as well with 50 cubes behind the front chairs and 22 cubes behind the second row which compares favorably with the bigger Outlander whose numbers are 63 and 34 cubes respectively. In other words, the Sport could be dangerous at a Home Depot or Lowe's.

Now perhaps here is the best part, the window sticker, which is sometimes referred to as the Monroney, named for late Oklahoma Sen. Mike Monroney, whose legislation in 1958 required window stickers. My top of the line AWD SEL lists for \$25,895, plus \$2,000 for the Touring Package and \$125 for the fancy floor mats and \$100 for the cargo compartment cover. The boat from Okazaki, Japan, costs \$940, bringing the total to \$29,110 which is probably the best value is a subcompact CUV. And it comes with a standard ten year/100,000-mile powertrain warranty. The key word is value.

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.