



Mitsubishi Challenger



MITSUBISHI SAYS THAT ITS NEW Challenger is whatever you want it to be, but the company is promoting it as a sports utility vehicle, because it slips rather neatly into the UK line-up between two of the models on which it's based. It has the engines, ladder-frame chassis and front suspension of the beefy Shogun, and the rear springing of the "lifestyle" L200 Double Cab.

Although we're being persuaded that the newcomer is really simply a big estate car that just happens to have off-road ability, with its on-demand four-wheel drive, high and low ratio gearing and generous ground clearance, it has all the right credentials to be seriously competent when it comes to tackling the steep and slippery stuff. And so it proved over a swampy course that we encountered on the launch.

The (five-door) range comprises three models: two 2.5 turbo-diesels (GL and GLS) and a three-litre V6 petrol (GLS). We drove the oil-burner (likely to be the most popular) and were impressed by its smooth, "silent shaft" running and easy-going ability to cruise relatively quietly at motorway speeds. It's in no particular hurry to get places, though – 98bhp doesn't go far in a mighty meaty motor like this; 0-60mph takes about 18sec and it's flat out at 90mph. Equivalent numbers for the more muscular 3.0 V6 are 11sec and 109mph, and since there's

only about 4mpg difference in the "combined" fuel consumption figures, we know which version we would choose – at least for on-road use.

Neither model is available as an automatic, but the manual transmission has a positive shift and an easily managed clutch, but there's no room alongside the pedal for your left foot.

Because it's destined to spend much of its time on tarmac, it's fortunate that the Challenger has a respectable ride. It's quite firm and can prove jiggly on broken surfaces, but otherwise it's acceptably compliant. And the firmness pays off in terms of handling; there's no tendency to wallow and cornering lean is held at bay by anti-roll bars at each end. Pity that the steering suffers from free-play about the straight-ahead position, though; it lacks the more positive feel of a Frontera or Discovery.

Inside, there's excellent vision all round from the commanding driving position, tailored to taste by a tilt-adjustable steering wheel and a (manual) height-adjustable seat. The "burr walnut printed facia trim" on the GLS won't be to everyone's taste, and the additional dash-top instrument pod looks a desperate afterthought. The clear dials are easy to read, however, but peering down too long at the low-mounted radio/cassette and (where specified) the navigation system's small screen, could prove hazardous.

The Challenger is well equipped, but if you want cruise control, power seats and leather upholstery, you'll have to pay extra. An electric sunroof is provided, however, as is air conditioning on the GLS, which can be set to provide pleasantly warm feet and cool faces. Back seat passengers will also appreciate the reclining backrests, good headroom and generous kneeroom. You tend to sit rather low with your knees up, so thigh support for tall occupants isn't too good.

No complaints about the cabin's versatility, though. As well as the usual back seat folding, that transforms the big boot into a huge cargo area, the front seatbacks can be fully reclined to form a leg-stretching sleeping area. Long though the load deck is, it's high to lift cargo into – the spare wheel is housed below it – and there's only a modest 35cm of height below the GLS's pull-out security cover.

VERDICT

Mitsubishi may call the Challenger a large estate car or sports utility job, but don't expect it to perform, ride or handle like a conventional estate – and it's not exactly sporty for a sports ute, either. Class it how you will, to us this is simply another of those many mid-sized, tarmac-friendly 4x4s we're all familiar with at the supermarket or queued up near the school gates.

But that's not to decry the Challenger's solid, well-made feel, its roominess and versatility – not to mention an impressive off-road ability that it will no doubt rarely be asked to demonstrate. While offering nothing startlingly new or trendsetting, the Challenger is, nevertheless, a competent all-rounder that's well equipped and comes competitively priced.

FACTS AND FIGURES

	2.5TD GLX, GLS	3.0 V6 GLS
ENGINE		
Type	longitudinal four in line	longitudinal V6
Size	2477cc	2972cc
Valves	single ohc, 8 valves	single ohc, 24 valves
Fuel system	turbocharged and intercooled indirect-injection diesel. 74-litre tank	multi-point petrol injection. 74-litre tank
Power	98bhp at 4000rpm	174bhp at 5000rpm
Torque	177 lb ft at 2000rpm	188 lb ft at 4500rpm
TRANSMISSION		
Type	five-speed manual; part-time four-wheel drive with high and low transfer gears, plus limited-slip differential	
Mph per 1000rpm	GLX: 21.7, GLS: 21.0	22.2 in top gear
CHASSIS		
Suspension - front	independent double wishbones with torsion bar and telescopic dampers; anti-roll bar	
- rear	coil-sprung live axle with trailing arm and Panhard rod location and telescopic dampers; anti-roll bar	
Steering	recirculating ball and nut with hydraulic power assistance	
Wheels	6JJx15in steel with 235/75R15 tyres	7JJx16in alloy with 245/70R16 tyres (also on 2.5TD GLS)
Brakes	ventilated discs front, solid discs rear ABS standard on GLS models	
DIMENSIONS		
Length	454.5cm	454.5cm
Width	GLX: 169.5cm, GLS: 177.5cm	GLS: 177.5cm
Height	GLX: 172.0cm, GLS: 177.5cm	GLS: 177.5cm