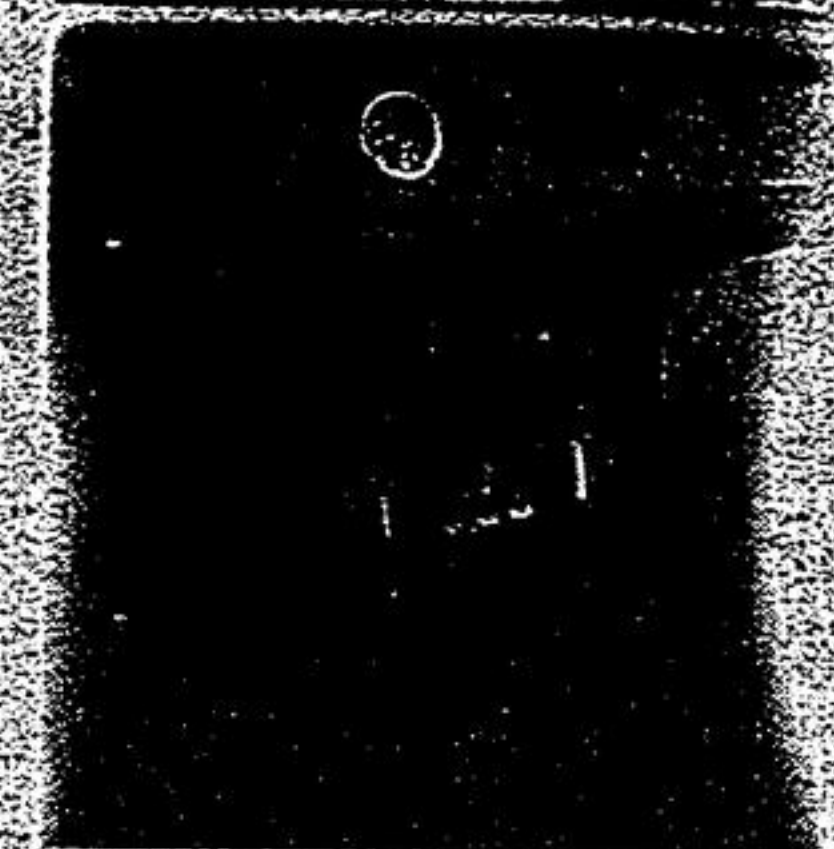


MORE OUTLANDER
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WHEELS

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OUTLANDER INTERIOR
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The Outlander is available in three packages. All have the same 2.4-litre MIVEC four-cylinder engine that produces 160 horsepower and 162 pound-feet of torque.

Outlander combines stylish looks and car-like performance

By LORNE DRURY
Special

Mitsubishi Motors came to the dance late with its entry-level Outlander sport utility, but it's quickly making up for lost time.

Based on the Lancer sedan platform, the Outlander drew generally positive reviews when it debuted in 2003. However, there was one nagging complaint: a noticeable lack of power compared to its competitors.

That hurdle has been addressed in the 2004 model, which boasts a new, more powerful 2.4-litre engine, producing 160 horsepower (up 20 hp over last year), and putting the Outlander on a level playing field with the competition.

And that competition is stiff. It includes Toyota, which created the sport-cute category of small SUVs with the RAV4 in 1996. Honda followed with its CR-V a year later and Subaru made the field even more competitive with its strong-selling Forester a year after that. Since then, the Hyundai

Santa Fe, the Mazda Tribute and Ford Escape and the Saturn Vue have also come along.

The Outlander gives Mitsubishi four entries in the sport utility category, with the Montero, Montero Sport and Endeavor rounding out the lineup.

What the Outlander provides is an entry-level SUV and a real alternative to the sedan. They call it a cross-over vehicle because it has a truck-like design and car-like handling. It combines cargo-hauling utility, stylish looks and car-like performance with the option of either front-wheel or all-wheel drive.

The Outlander is available in three packages. All have the same 2.4-litre MIVEC four-cylinder engine that produces 160 horsepower and 162 pound-feet of torque.

It is mated to Mitsubishi's four-speed automatic Sportronic transmission, which allows for manually activated clutch-less shifts.

The base LS model is offered in front-wheel drive only and lists for \$24,458.

Move up to the LS all-wheel drive, for \$27,078 and the top-of-the-line XLS AWD versions for \$29,019.

The LS trim includes standard features like colour-keyed door handles, air conditioning, 140-watt CD audio system, cruise control, power windows/door-locks/mirrors, rear intermittent wiper, 60/40 reclining rear seats and dual vanity mirrors. Alloy wheels, a tubular roof rack, keyless entry, cargo cover and privacy glass are available as options on the LS models.

The XLS provides a tubular roof rack, large rear spoiler, colour-keyed side mirrors, privacy glass, fog lamps, 16-inch five-spoke alloy wheels and clear tail lamp lenses. The XLS interior features upgraded seat cover materials and a leather-wrapped steering wheel and shift knobs. Options include a Sun and Sound package (\$1,380) which offers a premium six-speaker, 210-watt Infinity sound system and a power glass sunroof. Wheel arch fender flares, leather seating surfaces, roof rack accessories and ABS are also available. A Luxury Package (\$1,720) provides heated leather

seats, auto-dimming rearview mirror with compass and temperature readings, side airbags and heated side mirrors.

Our tester was an AWD XLS model with the Sun and Sound and Luxury packages. While the sunroof didn't get any action during this mid-winter test, the heated leather seats sure were a treat on those cold, cold mornings when the wind chill was in the minus 30 degree range.

But, best of all was the all-wheel drive feature which proved its worth during the back-to-back snow storms we endured in late January.

While many other vehicles on the road were slip-sliding around during one morning when up to 10 cm of the white stuff slowed traffic to a crawl, the Outlander plowed along straight and true.

On days like that, you sure do appreciate the value of all-wheel drive, a feature that makes so much sense in a climate such as ours, provided you drive according to the weather and road conditions.

See OUTLANDER, page

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