

SUV - MITSUBISHI OUTLANDER

Not at all. Mitsubishi's not going down the herd of typical soft-roaders. In fact, says **Debabrata Sarkar**, it's the lone zebra in the great wildebeest migration

# Ute too?

CAR OF THE YEAR  
SUV '08

**THIS ONE WILL HOPEFULLY PUT THE** triple diamond logo back in the reckoning. Mitsubishi hasn't had a happy history in India, and despite the long line of incredible cars they've handed out (most of them rally-bred) they're still struggling to get on the radar of most buyers. Even now, as we drive around the sparsely-populated streets of suburban Mumbai well into the night, the car doesn't evoke the sort of recognition you'd expect from passersby. At first glance, most people just dismiss it as another SUV, and only a few slightly more literate souls cast a knowing and appreciative eye on the Outlander. The styling, quite frankly, isn't too imaginative - lots of soft curves and plain panels along with compulsorily flared wheel arches. There are also the bee hive-like tail lights; but there's nothing extraordinary that catches your attention and makes you go, "Whoa!"

To tell you the truth, after years of looking up to and praising Pajeros and the Monteros, we had our reservations about an all-new soft-roader from Mitsubishi. I mean, these are the guys who thrashed everyone at the Dakar Rally; they make proper hardcore SUVs that climb mountains, not straddle urban traffic jams. The soft-roader business should be left to people like Honda, who make pretend SUVs like the CR-V and are frankly quite good at it. So >



SUV - MITSUBISHI OUTLANDER

Up till now, most of the current lot of soft-roaders have been plain inadequate, both as cars and as SUVs. Mitsubishi though, has struck the perfect balance here.

then why bother burning your fingers trying to do something you aren't used to? One reason could be that the smell of honey from the soft-roader segment was just overwhelming. But another could be that the guys at Mitsubishi seem to have found the perfect formula to make the perfect urban SUV.

Think about it. With every single road in the city being either dug up or clogged with traffic these days, there are more and more of us looking forward to weekends when we can finally give in to some road lust and head out for a proper drive. And the urban SUV or the soft-roader fits the bill perfectly. But up till now, most of these have been plain inadequate, both as cars and as SUVs. Mitsubishi though, has struck the perfect balance. The Outlander has more than enough spunk to outrun the best of cars on the highway, and is still rugged enough to fulfil your mildly adventurous fantasies. No, it isn't the quickest or the best-handling, and thank God for that. The Outlander isn't just another SUV that's been smoothed round the edges to fit into an urban environment. That is possibly what makes the Outlander as perfect as it is. We've had enough of the wannabe SUV's bragging about their car-like handling. I mean, wouldn't you just buy a car if you wanted one? Why go through an elaborate process of trying to make Scarlett Johansson look like Eric Bana and then pay more money for it?

It's a done deal, then. The Outlander is more than capable of taking on the rest of it along the way. But while even bettering some bits of it along the way. But it's the overall appeal that gets me the most. We finally have a soft-roader that hasn't completely lost its balls. Yes, the hairy chest is gone, so is the lump of lard from around its belly, and the muscles are better defined now. But there's still that reassuring stubble around the face. You're instantly comfortable in the Outlander, and you definitely aren't scared of bumping off a couple of people or heading out on a camping trip and getting your feet dirty. If this isn't the perfect SUV, what is? ■