

Aim to PLEASE

The Mitsubishi Outlander is big outside and clever inside, and priced to put the Honda CR-V on uneasy footing

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It's finally here. The Outlander, which Mitsubishi hopes will give it a leg up in the small SUV segment, has been launched. And this is a serious segment worth battling over — look at all the Honda CR-Vs fitting across the landscape.

It's been nine months since Mitsubishi first announced plans to launch the Outlander — time spent ironing out teething troubles in the run-up to assembling the Outlander at its Chennai car plant.

It looks good and is the right size — it looks like a big SUV, without the bulk and associated parking nightmares. The big chin, angular headlamps and black grille make it look far better than the gawky CR-V. From the rear, the blacked-out LED tail lamps make the Outlander instantly recognisable.

FIRST GLANCE

At 4,660 mm, it is longer than the CR-V too. But its real advantage is the 50 mm longer wheelbase, which means more passenger room. Overall, it's a pleasing shape, designed to appeal to everyone.

The Outlander's cabin is a well thought out, functional place. The twin gloveboxes, felt-lined cubbyhole on the dash (great for your phone), door pockets that are actually useful and can carry full-size bottles, and big, easy to use controls — it's a cabin that quickly makes you feel at home.

Dashboard quality is good, very reminiscent of the Rs 30-lakh Montero — in a good way. All the controls function solidly and feel built to last, but the design looks a little bland and lacking in flair.

You'll like the driving position. The front seats are very supportive and the driver's seat is powered.

And there's good space as well. The 2,670 mm wheelbase makes for tremendous legroom at the rear. But the seats are a bit unsupportive — they could've been a little more contoured. The rear seats slide back and forth by 80 mm to improve legroom too.

The Indian Outlander is only available as a five-seater. This means you get a huge, well-shaped boot with

some really clever touches. For example, you can open the lower part of the split tailgate to easily load heavy luggage.

INTERIORS

The Outlander is powered by a 2.4-litre petrol engine putting out 170 bhp. Under normal conditions, power is sent to the front wheels via a six-step continuously variable transmission (no manual gearbox on offer). You can shift to four-wheel drive via a switch near the gearlever, but this system's trick is the lockable centre differential (it ensures that equal power is sent to the front and rear axles), which gives the Outlander reasonable off-roading prowess.

Start the engine and you'll be surprised by how quiet and smooth it is. At low speeds and when cruising, the engine remains hushed. But that's short-lived: accelerate hard and, past 4,000 rpm, it gets noisy and thrashy. Despite its 170 bhp, it doesn't feel very quick in a straight line either. But that's only when you go flat-out.

PERFORMANCE

In most situations, this engine has enough power to make overtaking easy. Use the paddleshifters to get even more overtaking power.

The Outlander uses an aluminium roof panel, which reduces that top-heavy feeling you get in SUVs and also improves handling. The steering is well weighted and there's just a hint of body roll. There's good grip from the tyres and the four-wheel-drive system gets you out of trouble when in bad road and weather conditions.

The suspension is independent all around. Like



all Mitsubishi's, the ride and handling compromise is very good. Low speed ride is absorbent, with a slight hint of stiffness over sharp bumps. At higher speeds, the ride is good — you don't get thrown about, the springs and the tyres absorbing most shocks.

The Outlander is impressively equipped. There are two airbags, ABS with brake-force distribution, paddle shifts, a trip computer, climate control, keyless entry, alloy wheels, High-Intensity Discharge headlamps, leather seats and an engine immobiliser. And sound quality — from the fantastic nine-speaker Rockford Fosgate audio system with sub-woofer — is very good.

The Outlander is available in only one variant, but you choose between black and beige interiors. Priced at Rs 18-20 lakh, it's aimed squarely at the CR-V and ends up being the better value alternative.

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