

Mitsubishi Lancer 1500GLX Liftback



JUST WHEN WE thought we'd got the name-tags of Mitsubishi's lower-medium-sized saloons and hatchbacks all sorted out (with the three-door hatches called Colts and the 111/4in longer four-door, booted saloons known as Lancers), along comes a pair of five-door hatchbacks, to extend even further the appeal of the range.

Sharing the saloon's overall length and wheelbase, the five-door versions also wear the saloon's Lancer name on their tailgates, although their supplementary 'Liftback' title should give the game away.

Adding to the existing three-door range (1300GL, 1500GLX and the racy 1800GTi-16v, the last two also available as four-door saloons), the Lancer Liftback comes as either this front-wheel drive 1500GLX or as a fuel-injected 1.8 litre with either two- or four-wheel drive.

Content with just two driven wheels, thanks to an unseasonably mild winter, we opted for the 1500GLX version. This currently costs about £1000 more than the equivalent saloon and £2000 more than the three-door version, making it look – on paper, at least – an expensive alternative...

AT THE WHEEL

– driver appeal?

In anybody's book, the Lancer could hardly be called quick. Its low-compression, low-tune engine starts readily and warms-up without a hint of temperament, thanks to the unobtrusive automatic choke; but even when warmed to its task, it's strictly a 'plodder'. At best, it feels more like a 1300, although it's obliging enough on the road and pulls quite strongly as long as the revs are kept in the mid-range, peak torque band. It's more than averagely happy to trundle along at low revs, too.

Thanks to adjustable this, that and the other, the Lancer provides a comfortable, confidence-inspiring driving position. The seats are reasonably supportive, too, with cushion-height adjustment to give shorter drivers a welcome lift, but we would have appreciated lumbar support adjusters during longer spells at the wheel.

Light, easy-to-use controls, together with bold, clear instruments and a generally sound ergonomic layout, mean that the Lancer could

hardly be easier to drive. The well-weighted, ideally-gearied power steering (three turns from lock to lock) and an ultra-light, cable-operated gearshift, in particular, make for a relaxing time at the wheel.

While not in the Peugeot league, the Lancer is blessed with a fairly relaxed, absorbent ride, although it can feel a touch 'floaty' over bumps at high speeds or when heavily laden. And, because it lacks the subtle compliance of a fully independent arrangement, the rear suspension tends to be caught out by potholes and ridges at town speeds.

Disappointingly, road noise and, to a lesser extent, mechanical noise from up front are both rather prominent, which can make the Lancer tiring on long, fast runs.

Forward vision presents few problems, but prominent side and rear pillars sometimes prove obstructive at angled junctions and when joining motorways.

Reversing manoeuvres can call for extra care, too, particularly with the rear head restraints in their fully raised position.

The provision of continuous and intermittent rear wiper settings is a nice touch (even though it requires no less than four separate prods for a quick wash-'n'-wipe), and the four-shot headlamps provide a positively illuminating main-beam spread. Dipped-beam performance seems myopic in comparison.

SPACE AND COMFORT

– popular with passengers?

Although the three-door and four-door versions are themselves quite well equipped, the Liftback does better still, with a standard inventory that includes power steering with a reach- and rake-adjustable wheel; electric windows and door mirrors; central locking; an electric tilt-and-slide sunroof; split-fold (50/50) back seats; height-adjustable driver's seat and seatbelt mounts, and adjustable head restraints front and rear.

Expected Japanese items such as remote-control tailgate and fuel-flap releases, a low-fuel warning lamp and a driver's left footrest are included as well, of course. The Liftback's additional five-door practicality adds only a modest £200 or so, compared with the four-door saloon which, incidentally, needs an £800 Diamond Option pack (comprising power steering and an electrically operated sunroof) to bring its equipment up to the same level.

Inside, the Liftback proves reasonably comfortable and spacious, with adequate room for a pair of six-footers in the back – or even three at a pinch.

There are numerous small slots and holes for storing oddments, including a handy 'sunglasses' cubby to the right of the wheel, plus that Mitsubishi hallmark – a pull-out tray under the front passenger's seat, invaluable for loose odds and ends. It's a pity that the centre console cubbies are narrow and fiddly to get to, and the front door bins don't hold much either.

The tailgate, which extends down to bumper level between the rear lamps, lifts high out of the way to ease loading, but we were distinctly unimpressed with the way that overnight rain 'waterfalls' all over the contents of the boot when it's opened.

The boot is of below-average size for the class, partly because of prominent wheelarch towers and the fact that the floor is 'jacked-up' to accommodate the full-size spare wheel (as used in the UK). Although satisfactory enough in operation, there's only a single support strap for the hinged load cover.



LIVING WITH THE LIFTBACK

– how reassuring?

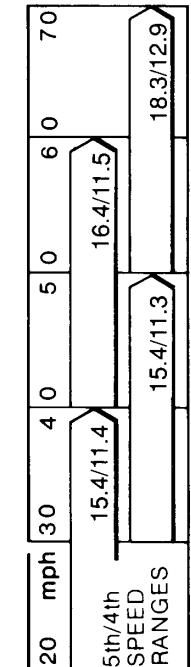
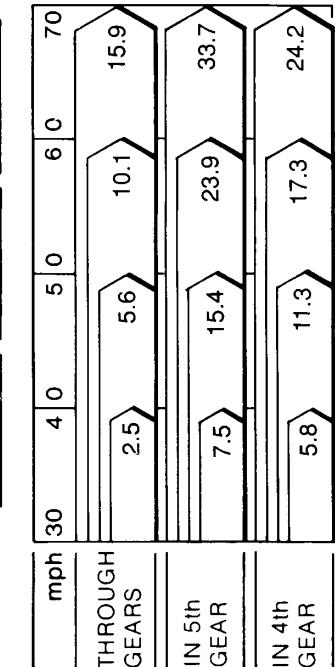
The Lancer isn't only mediocre in performance, it doesn't score too well on economy, either. Our 35½mpg overall comes out on the thirsty side of average, although 40mpg is possible with some restraint.

Thanks to its low-compression power unit it will at least run on cheaper grades of fuel – 95 octane unleaded variety, or even 2-star leaded, if you must. On top of this, the easy-filling tank has a reasonable capacity, and the constant-reading

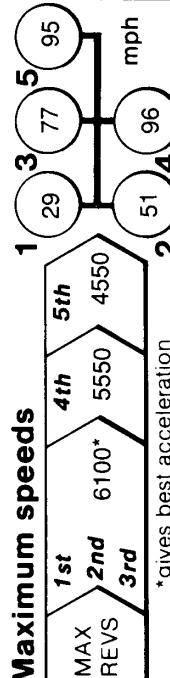
PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph 4.4	0-60mph 14.5	1/4 mile 19.7
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Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION

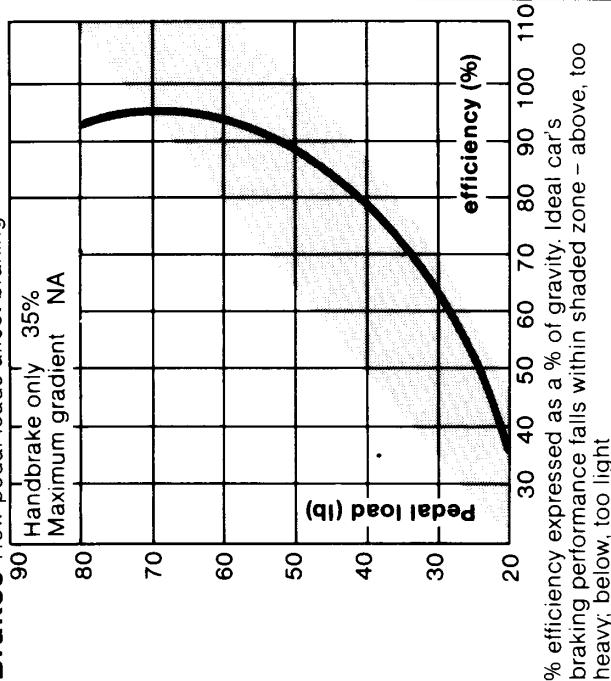
Fuel grade for tests: 95 octane unleaded

Normal range	mpg
hard driving, heavy traffic	30
short journeys in the suburbs	30
motorway - 70mph cruising	36½
brisk driving, mixed roads	35
gentle driving - rural roads	40½
Typical mpg overall	35½

Realistic tank range*
*based on gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes



Fade test
How hard use or water affects braking. (Ideal brakes show no change)

Pedal load needed for 5% stop (lb)

37	At start of test
33	After constant use
50	After severe use

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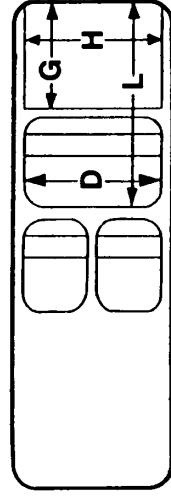
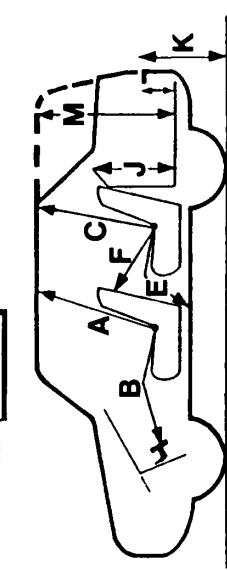
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WEIGHTS and MEASURES

Outside (ft and in)

Kerb weight	20 ^{3/4} cwt	Overall length	13ft 10 ^{3/4} in
Overall width	6ft 3 ^{3/4} in*	Overall height	4ft 7 ^{1/4} in
Wheelbase	8ft 0 ^{3/4} in		*5ft 5 ^{3/4} in with mirrors folded



Inside (inches)

A Front headroom	35 ^{1/4} -37	G Load length	34
B Front legroom (min - max)	33 ^{1/2} -42	H Load floor width (min - max)	29-53
C Rear headroom	36	J Load height	14 ^{1/2}
D Rear seat width (between armrests)	49 ^{1/4}	K Sill height (inner/outer)	3/25 ^{3/4}
E Typical rear legroom*	37 ^{3/4}	L Load length	55
F Typical rear kneeroom*	29	M Load height (to tailgate hinge)	29 ^{1/2}

*'Typical' represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 41in

fuel gauge and low-level warning lamp help to stretch the greatest number of miles from each tankful.

Inside, outside and even underneath, there's little to criticise about the build quality and, while the Lancer might cost a little more in the first place, Mitsubishi's three-year/unlimited-mileage warranty (plus the more usual six-year rust-through cover) offers virtually unrivalled peace of mind.

Apart from a lot of vacuum pipework associated with the carburettor, there's little to daunt those who venture under the bonnet and, helpfully, the routine check items (dipstick, brake fluid, windscreens washer bottle, and so on) are all marked in white.

The Lancer needs a trip to the dealer once a year or every 12,000 miles for a major service, with a minor (oil-change) visit midway. On the insurance side, the 1500GLX attracts a Group 5 rating – typically one group higher than for many domestic or European rivals – while the 4WD 1800GLXi attracts a high-ish Group 6 rating.

VERDICT

Easy to live with, competent and reassuring, the Lancer is yet another of those cars that doesn't shine in any particular area, yet has few real drawbacks, either.

It's a significantly more capable all-rounder than the generation it succeeds and, of course, taking the Colt/Lancer range as a whole, there's the choice of a compact three-door hatch, a stylish four-door saloon or this practical, family-sized five-door version, with a spread of performance and equipment to suit a wide variety of pockets and tastes.

In purely objective terms, its performance and economy, mechanical refinement and meagre load space are nothing to shout about, but then the build quality, generous equipment and prospect of excellent reliability certainly are.

Maybe the Lancer won't impress them too much down at the local, but it could well be just the ticket for loyal, everyday service, especially if you hanker for something a little different from all the familiar rep-mobiles in the car park.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 75.5mm bore x 82mm stroke = 1468cc. Iron block and alloy head; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 8.4:1

Valve gear single belt-driven overhead camshaft actuating two valves per cylinder via rockers

Fuel system one twin-throat Aisan carburettor (with automatic choke) fed by mechanical pump from 50-litre (11-gallon) tank; low-level warning lamp. Fuel required: 2 star/90 octane minimum leaded or 95 octane unleaded

Ignition system electronic, breakerless via coil and distributor

Maximum power (DIN-net) 74bhp at 5500rpm

Maximum torque (DIN-net) 87 lb ft at 3500rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch 7.2in diaphragm-spring, single dry plate; cable-operated. Pedal load/travel: 23 lb/5¹/₄in

Gearbox 5-speed (all synchromesh) and reverse (3-speed automatic optionally available). Ratios: first 3.36, second 1.95, third 1.28, fourth 0.94, fifth 0.78 and reverse 3.08:1

Final drive 4.02:1 to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm 21.12 in top, 17.48 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 3350 in top, 4050 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent MacPherson damper/struts with integral coil springs, lower links and anti-roll bar. Rear: semi-independent, torsional beam axle with coil spring/damper struts and anti-roll bar – located by trailing arms and Panhard rod. Dampers: telescopic all round

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion with 3 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 33¹/₂ft between kerbs, with 48¹/₄ft for one turn of wheel

Wheels 5.0J steel with 175/70R13 82H tyres (Dunlop SP Sport D8 on test car)

Brakes 9.6in ventilated discs front, 7.0in drums rear with vacuum servo

HOW IT COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel overall (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Max legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (in)	Steering turns/circle (ft)	Overall length (ft/in)
Mitsubishi Lancer 1500GLX	1468/74	96	15.9	33.7/24.2	35 ¹ / ₂	95/70	42	37 ³ / ₄ /29	3/33 ¹ / ₂ (p)	13' 10 ³ / ₄ "
Citroen BX 16TGS	1580/94	105	11.5	27.0/18.0	37 ¹ / ₂	83/35	43 ¹ / ₂	42/31	4 ¹ / ₂ /33 ¹ / ₂	13' 10 ¹ / ₂ "
Renault 19 1.4TSE	1390/80	104	12.7	28.9/22.0	41	83/33	40	37 ¹ / ₂ /28	4/33 ¹ / ₂	13' 7 ¹ / ₂ "
Rover 214SLi	1396/94	106	12.1	31.1/21.1	35	90/38*	42	39/28	*3 ¹ / ₂ /34 ¹ / ₂ (p)	13' 10 ¹ / ₄ "
Toyota Corolla 1.6 Executive	1587/94	102	13.1	25.4/19.3	38 ¹ / ₂	90/33	41 ¹ / ₄	37 ¹ / ₄ /26 ¹ / ₂	3 ¹ / ₄ /33 ³ / ₄ (p)	13' 10"

* with optional ABS

(p) = power assisted

* optional