

Individuality

by Joe Sage

Don't let Mitsubishi's mild-mannered presence throw you. A main mission for this manufacturer is to keep the brand's individuality. "If we act the same as the competition, we'll simply blend in," says marketing director Francine Harsini. The brand embraces finding its own way in the world.

Mitsubishi has begun an American resurgence. Though much bigger in the rest of the world, in our market they were due for refreshed products. They've got 'em. And some brand new products. Those are on the way. And despite having staked out its turf in an economical realm, people always want features and performance. Duly enhanced.

Mitsubishi sales climbed 40 percent last year, topped only by Jeep at 43. This impressively new 2016 Outlander—the 7-passenger sibling to their top-selling 5-passenger Outlander Sport—is expected to keep the bread rising.

There are six different ways to buy an Outlander (not even counting the smaller Sport). Engine and transmission are one variable; all-wheel drive is another. The lineup works like this: the base ES model starts at \$22,995, has a 166-hp 2.4-liter 4-cylinder engine with continuously variable transmission (CVT), and comes as front-drive only. Next up is the SE, with the same 2.4-liter engine and

CVT. This bumps up \$1000 for features along the lines of fog lights and color-keyed power mirrors, but also lets you opt for S-AWC (Super All-Wheel Control) AWD, for another \$2000. Add more premium features, still with the same 2.4L/CVT and same FWD/AWD option, and you have the SEL (that's L as in luxury)—the model we have here.

The GT model lives on sort of a parallel plane, with a 224-hp V6 (with 215 lb-ft of torque, versus 162 lb-ft on the others). It's also the only one with a 6-speed electronic automatic, rather than CVT. And the V6 GT comes only with S-AWC AWD.

All three 2WD models are rated 31 MPG highway, 29 MPG for the AWD versions. The V6-AWD combo in the GT rates 27 highway (it also requires premium fuel, unlike the others). The GT may have an edge on a high-speed climb up I-17 (it can also tow 3500 pounds, versus 1500 for the others). We found the SEL sufficiently powered around town.

From 7-passenger seating to cargo volumes, the Outlander is a packaging triumph, bigger on the inside than the outside. Its turning circle is tighter than many a 5-seater, a huge advantage.

The options in our economical sample's package are desirable, though now we have topped \$30,000 (the smaller Sport starts a hair above

\$20,000, and the bigger Outlander at \$22,995).

Put it all together, and there may be compelling reasons to lust after the GT—power most of all. But the 4-cylinder models have lower purchase prices, higher MPG and no thirst for premium fuel. Economy still looms large in Mitsubishi's competitive formula, making our SEL a top choice for most buyers, with AWD the one other prime personal decision. With AWD, the price gap to GT closes to \$4000, and if you match options, \$2100. So if you don't mind a bit higher fuel bill over time, the GT may also still be worth a test drive. ■

SPECIFICATIONS: 2.4 SEL 2WD

ENGINE.....	2.4L MIVEC SOHC 16v 4-cyl
HP/TORQUE.....	166 hp / 162 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION.....	CVT (continuously variable)
DRIVETRAIN.....	FWD (AWD optionally available)
SEATING CAPACITY.....	7-passenger
TURNING CIRCLE.....	34.8 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE.....	8.5 in
TOW CAPACITY.....	1500 lb (GT with V6 = 3500)
CARGO CAPACITY.....	34.2 / 63.3 / 128.2 cu ft
WEIGHT.....	3494 lb
MPG.....	25/31/27 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE **\$24,995**

SEL TOURING PACKAGE: MMCS nav system w/ SiriusXM (3 mos incl) and 2 map updates, rain sensing wipers w/ deicers, power remote liftgate, power glass sunroof, power folding mirrors, auto headlights, 710-watt Rockford-Fosgate 9-speaker premium audio, forward collision mitigation, adaptive cruise, lane departure warning5250

DESTINATION CHARGE:850

TOTAL **\$31,095**

Our Mitsubishi Outlander SEL 2WD combined the lineup's dominant 2.4L engine and CVT with top trim for that drivetrain, only stopping short of having available S-AWC all-wheel drive.

