

Partnership perks and progress BY JOE SAGE

Though Renault has not had a market presence in the US in over 30 years, they have been partnered with Nissan since 1999 via stock acquisition, and 2002 via formal agreement (not a merger), adding Mitsubishi in 2016-2017 per the same pattern, creating the Nissan-Renault-Mitsubishi Alliance.

Though one of Japan's biggest conglomerates overall, Mitsubishi has been quite small in the US automotive segment. Now, with the energy of an upstart newcomer to this group and the nimbleness its small size allows, they are evolving.

Looking at relativity among their three US brands—Nissan itself, premium-luxe Infiniti and now Mitsubishi—the flagship gen-four Mitsubishi Outlander, new from the ground up, costs little more than half what a flagship Nissan Armada costs, or little more than a third the Infiniti QX80. The comparison is not this simple, however, as the top-model Outlander has more in common—notably its Nissan-Renault platform—with Nissan Rogue, which sits farther down that brand's lineup and is more similarly priced. Either way, it adds up

to a top model at a mid-model price. Keeping the affordable partner affordable, with today's universally high build quality and feature inclusions, while protecting the higher value of the premium brand, is tricky, with benefits to the buyer. Mitsubishi styling has been evolving rapidly, now possibly the most attractive of the three, certainly worthy of a most-improved award—with advanced sheet metal and lighting treatments outside, and on ours a handsome stitched and quilted leather interior. The user interface is simplified but

complete, and there are a variety of power outlets (though none out of sight in the console bin). The Bose audio is a fairly mainstream unit.

One place the value end is locked in is the vehicle's 181-hp four-cylinder engine, not a lot for a three-row SUV, though our top model with all options and all-wheel drive weighs just 3803 pounds. It can be a little slow on the uptake in aggressive Valley traffic, though it's fine once in motion.

Special modes tackle slippery, rocky, snowy and muddy conditions. With our sample's low-hanging bejeweled lights, deluxe big wheels and shallow sidewall tires, we passed on any serious off-road-

ing, though it was great on routine dirt roads. Outlander has a CVT, which confirmed CVT-dislikers will notice, but transmission agnostics probably won't, with similar awareness levels likely for its front-wheel-drive bias, electric steering and suspension. On the plus side, the Outlander has a particularly tight turning circle, all the moreso for a three-row. One thing that did bother us consistently were harsh speedbumps—avoid those (or live with 'em) and all else emerges as just fine.

You will get more than your money's worth with Outlander, even in this top model, and it seems so right on down the line. Mitsubishi is clearly reinforcing its own spot among the now-three alliance brands in the US, not as a redundant third wheel, but as an equal and solid value option. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|---|--|
| ASSEMBLY | Okazaki, Japan |
| ENG/TRANS | Japan / Japan |
| ENGINE | 2.5L MIVEC DOHC 4-cyl DI alum/alum |
| COMPRESSION RATIO | 12.0:1 |
| HP/TORQUE | 181 hp / 181 lb-ft |
| TRANSMISSION | CVT |
| DRIVETRAIN | (opt) S-AWC (Super All-Wheel Control) |
| SUSPENSION | F: MacPherson strut, stblzr bar; R: multi-link, stblzr bar |
| STEERING | electric pwr steering |
| BRAKES | F: 13.8-in vented; R: 13.0-in vented |
| WHEELS | 20x8J alum alloy / P255/45 R20 |
| LENGTH / WHEELBASE | 185.4 / 106.5 in |
| TURNING CIRCLE | 36.1 ft |
| HEADROOM (F/2/3) (w snrf) | 38.8 / 37.4 / 34.5 in |
| LEGROOM (F/2/3) | 41.7 / 39.9 / 18.7 in |
| CARGO CAPACITY | 11.7 / 33.5 / 78.3 cu.ft |
| GROUND CLEARANCE | 8.4 in |
| WEIGHT / DISTRIBUTION | 3803 lb / 57/43% |
| TOW CAPACITY | 2000 lb |
| FUEL / CAPACITY | reg unl / 14.5 gal |
| MPG | 24/30/26 (city/hwy/comb) |
| BASE PRICE | \$33,745 |
| WHITE DIAMOND PAINT | 595 |
| SEL TOURING PKG: heated steering wheel, synthetic leather door inserts/quilted (black/saddle tan), semi-aniline leather seats, 10.8" HUD, Bose premium 10-sprkr audio, power pano roof, rear door pull-up sunshades | 2700 |
| TONNEAU COVER | 195 |
| WELCOME PKG: carpeted floor mats & portfolio, touchup paint pen, center console tray mat | 160 |
| DESTINATION CHARGE | 1195 |
| TOTAL | \$38,590 |

2022 OUTLANDER LINEUP

| | FWD | AWD |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| ES | \$25,795 | \$27,595 |
| w ES Convce Pkg | 26,795 | 28,595 |
| SE | 28,845 | 30,645 |
| w SE Tech Pkg | 31,145 | 32,945 |
| SE Launch Ed | 30,990 | 32,790 |
| SEL | 31,945 | 33,745 |
| w SEL Touring Pkg | 34,645 | 36,445 |
| SEL Launch Ed | --- | 36,340 |