

Launched

12  
DRIVEN

1. MITSUBISHI LANCER EVO IX

2. MITSUBISHI LANCER MIVEC

3. ASTON MARTIN V8 VANTAGE

4. NISSA GT-R

5. HOLDEN FIERA

6. KIA NIO

7. DODGE STRATUS

8. AUDI A8 AVANT

9. AUDI A8

10. VOLVO S40

11. MITSUBISHI LANCER

12. MITSUBISHI LANCER



## Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX

Coming in numbers, and poised for max attack

WE'RE at the fast, flowing Phillip Island circuit, where aces from Gardner to Rossi have stunned us with their skill and daring on two wheels.

This morning the Mitsubishi Evolution IX is doing the impressing. It's revelling in the absence of broken bitumen and on-boost/off-boost staccato progress that blights the Evo experience in the real - speed-limited - world.

The Island's variety is showcasing an incredibly talented amalgam. A shock-and-awe drivetrain, no-fade Brembos,

quick, accurate steering and great all-wheel-drive chassis make the entry, middle and exit of any corner a highly controllable adventure in attitude.

More people - about 500 annually - now get the chance to judge Evo for themselves, as IX signals the changeover from limited imports under the Special Enthusiasts Vehicle Scheme, to full-time membership in Mitsubishi's local range.

As a result the price drops to \$56,789, putting Evo within \$160 of WRX STi and tucking it under the luxury-car tax. That's

despite a lift in interior presentation and standard equipment that includes climate control, a six-CD stacker and a GPS-based vehicle tracking system.

Outside, the three diamonds floating in a mesh grille signal the post-Boulay styling era. There are circular cooling ducts that feed to the front-mounted intercooler and a new rear diffuser that reduces drag and enhances visual appeal.

There's no slacking, despite this being the final Evo based on the Japan-only Cedia wide body. Evo X will spring from the new-gen Lancer previewed at Frankfurt, and we'll see it in 2007-08.

The IX's improvements start with weight, which drops an impressive 60kg to 1410kg. The savings are reaped via an aluminium roof and door-intrusion bars, and lighter (by 150 grams) Enkei 17-inch alloy wheels. Two hundred extra spot welds ensure the body stays tight.

Revisions to the engine (see sidebar) result in a 'politically correct' power claim of 206kW at 6500rpm and 355Nm at 3000rpm. The 11kW power hike over VIII is bolstered by a meatier torque curve.

Add a new close-ratio six-speed manual gearbox - replacing the VIII's five-speed - and 0.4sec is cut from the 0-100km/h



Post-Boulay grille loses protruding schnoz. Circular ducts feed intercooler

claim (5.7), a significant 0.9sec comes off the 0-400m (13.6) and there's a massive 2.4sec reduction accelerating from 80-120km/h in fourth gear (6.6). Mitsubishi also claims the engine is cleaner (Euro III) and more frugal (10.0L/100km versus 10.9L/100km for VIII).

At Phillip Island, the engine's improved flexibility is very much on show. There's little lag intrusion to slow the vibrant yet linear power delivery. Instead, mash the throttle, back-slap into the alcantara/leather Recaro, snatch another gear, listen as the growl rises in intensity and start preparing for the next corner rushing into view.

Pitch in and you'll find it's all eminently within the control of the IX's chassis, which remains fundamentally unchanged from VIII. The front struts are now inverted to lower unsprung weight and





#### CAMS

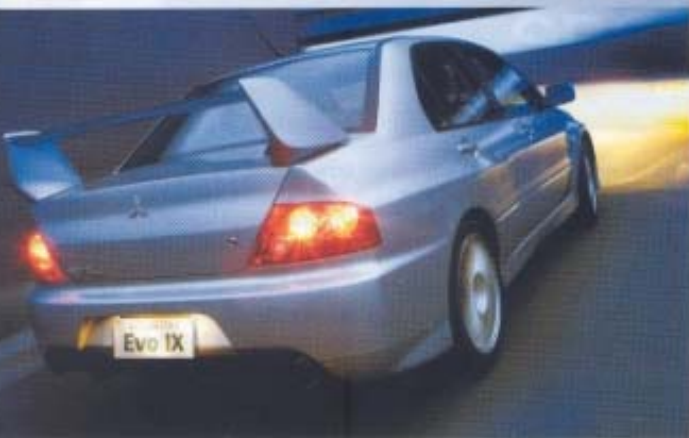
The legendary 4G63 2.0-litre dohc engine now has MIVEC variable valve timing on the intake cam. Valve timing (but not lift) is altered by a variable-area cam sprocket actuated by an oil control valve.

#### COMBUSTION

More efficient combustion is achieved by using longer spark plugs, two-piece piston rings and a reduced back-pressure exhaust. Result? More power, cleaner emissions and lower fuel usage.

#### TURBO

The Evo IX gains a reprofiled twin-scroll turbo that's claimed to improve response across the rev range by as much as 10 percent. It was developed by Mitsubishi's WRC team hofhins.



## Mitsubishi Lancer

### Bigger engine fails to tip the balance

THERE are several logical reasons to consider Mitsubishi's upgraded Lancer sedan and wagon if you're in the market for a small car.

The most compelling is the replacement of the old 2.0-litre engine with the more modern 2.4-litre four-cylinder already seen here in the Grandis people-mover and Outlander compact all-terrain.

With the benefit of MIVEC cam switching (as opposed to the MIVEC variable-valve-timing system employed by Evo IX), the 4G69 engine produces more power and torque than virtually all competitors.

The addition of this engine and the restructure of the range with more standard equipment and less models – the Exceed has gone – means more chance of finding what you need at an affordable price.

For instance, the base model 2.4 ES sedan adds around \$3000 worth of gear, including disc brakes at both ends with ABS for a \$1000 price rise over the 2.0. It also comes with power windows, cruise control and white-faced instruments.

The mid-range LS gets chrome trim on the grille, 15-inch alloys, leather-wrapped steering wheel, gearshift knob and handbrake lever grip, premium six-speaker AM/FM audio system with six-CD stacker and automatic climate control air-conditioning.

The VR-X is marginally better off,

adding niceties such as sports seats.

With all this, Mitsubishi is hoping to keep private sales afloat while triggering more fleet interest in a car range that must survive until an all-new replacement model arrives in 2007.

Now discard logic and assess the Lancer on the basis of criteria closer to your heart and the argument becomes a bit shakey and vague, something like the VR-X's body control and steering on a winding, corrugated road.

And the new engine doesn't help much because it just doesn't feel as well endowed as the spec sheet suggests. It's not helped by a wide gap between the crucial second and third gears in the manual gearbox, which often leaves the engine buzzing or lugging.

So as logical and as thrifty as these changes are, they can't disguise the Lancer's age and inadequacies. There are better small-car drives out there. Last month's Mega Test is a good place to start looking.

BRUCE NEWTON

<b>Model</b>	Mitsubishi Lancer VR-X
<b>Engine</b>	2378cc 4cyl. dohc, 16v
<b>Max Power</b>	115kW @ 5750rpm
<b>Max Torque</b>	220Nm @ 3500rpm
<b>Transmission</b>	5-speed manual
<b>0-100km/h</b>	9.0sec (estimated)
<b>Price</b>	\$26,990
<b>On sale</b>	Now

- Great value: added gear from 2.4 engine
- Bland styling; uninspiring dynamics

new rear springs lower the rear end slightly, but the 'Active Centre Differential' and 'Super Active Yaw Control' are as before, distributing the drive fore-aft and side-to-side as required.

Lapping in the island sun is beyond fun. It's phenomenal. Sure, this place is the spiritual home of two wheels, but the Evo IX undoubtedly belongs. Wayne and Valentino would approve.

BRUCE NEWTON

<b>Model</b>	Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
<b>Engine</b>	1997cc 4cyl. dohc, 16v, turbo
<b>Max Power</b>	206kW @ 6500rpm
<b>Max Torque</b>	355Nm @ 3000rpm
<b>Transmission</b>	6-speed manual
<b>0-100km/h</b>	5.7sec (claimed)
<b>Price</b>	\$56,789
<b>On sale</b>	Now

- Fast, furious fun with a safety net
- Could you live with it everyday?



#### INSIDE STORY

- 1 Metal-look dash trim and black-on-white dials add a hint of sportiness
- 2 Drilled aluminium pedals are standard fare in range-topping VR-X
- 3 No Evo-style Recaros, but VR-X's sports seats aren't too shabby