



# Mitsubishi Lancer SEi

## Shine on, you crazy diamond

Maybe not the jewel in the crown, but a gem for the price.

### WITH APOLOGIES TO DAVE

Gilmore and Pink Floyd, but I am a little concerned for Mitsubishi's sanity, leading into the Christmas break.

Yes, I know, it's the silly season, but with the pricing of this particular car, I reckon someone at Mitsubishi HQ has hit the egg nog a little early this year.

Mitsubishi has started its engines on the passenger vehicle front, pushing out a raft of 2012 models just ahead of Christmas 2011.

**NZ Cargo Magazine** will be looking at the largest number of these in February, but in deference to the fact that the first of the profiled 2012 models is something of a fleet favourite – and priced not to sell, but be given away - we thought an early peek at the Mitsubishi Lancer was worthy Christmas reading.

The Lancer has been Mitsubishi's stalwart fleet car for many, many years and before the market moved to focus on the corporate and fleet buying sectors, Lancers adorned driveways all round the country as private sector cars.

Lancer's forays into the fleet sector

have not been as spectacular, but the cars are there in Fleet-land both in sedan and hatchback versions.

For the market of today, Mitsubishi is looking to swell its market penetration into the realms of corporate fleet.

To this end, the company is providing Lancers with more than a hint of distinction, thus making it even easier for fleet managers to put their people into one brand, offering an entry, workhorse and mid level management option bearing the Triple Diamond logo.

For our purposes, Mitsubishi laid on an SEi Lancer, which we surmise is targeting the mid-level management as it seems to have all the bells and whistles required and some extra bits and pieces added in for effect.

And the effect is that of a strikingly good looking car - if a little hard to keep clean with its glossy black exterior.

Indeed, on looks alone, you could almost be forgiven for wondering why Mitsubishi bothers with an Evo at all, performance notwithstanding. The reality is however, that the SEi Lancer

does turn heads, especially those of the younger generation.

This is a good thing, as the Lancer may well be the fleet vehicle of choice for a good number of people heading into the workforce as drivers, though we suspect they won't be jumping straight into an SEi model.

Before we get into what makes up the SEi, it's probably a good idea to bring you up to speed with the complete Lancer line up.

Starting at the entry level then, there is the 2-litre ES model with either a CVT or manual transmission and in either sedan or hatchback configuration.

Next up is the SEi – again in sedan or hatch versions, but offering the CVT only transmission, mated to the 2-litre engine.

Go one step further and you come to the VRx with its 2.4-litre engine, CVT only and once again in hatch or sedan and then you stop just shy of the Evo with the Ralliart 2-litre turbocharged sedan with its exclusive 6-speed, twin clutch, automatic transmission.

So with a total of nine variants in



the range, Lancer is perhaps one of Mitsubishi's more prolific models starting at around \$30k to about \$51k, with the SEi currently available under the price point of the entry level Lancer.

Normally retailing at \$36,990, the SEi Lancer – as at December 1 – was listed at \$29,990 plus on roads, making it very shrewd buying indeed.

Perhaps that 'new to the workforce' team member maybe getting into an SEi Lancer after all.

But what does SEi actually mean? I'm inclined to go with 'Specificationally Enhanced Inspiration,' as the SEi Lancer has bits and bobs on board which Lancer is not traditionally known for.

For example, to get into the car, there's Mitsubishi's KOS (Keyless Operating System), which means you just keep the 'key' fob in your pocket, handbag, and by merely touching the door handle, the car will recognise you as the driver and let you in.

Turn the little piece of plastic that is where you would expect to find the ignition and you're away.

You'll be sitting on leather as the SEi Lancer offers this in all seating positions – electrically adjustable for the driver - which is nice, but it goes a little further with the SEi – providing seat heaters for both front occupants.

You have a rear view mirror, which, when you put the car into reverse comes up with a screen inset on the left hand side for the reversing camera.

You have audio controls on the steering wheel, opposite the cruise control and above the hands-free Bluetooth® system, which incidentally, features voice recognition and command functionality.

Naturally, there is USB connectivity as part of the six-speaker audio suite.

There's rear privacy glass with tints so dark, there's no way of knowing what you have on the back seat – safe and gives you an ultra-cool look too.

And Mitsubishi has incorporated its Smartbrake accelerator override system - a device which ignores accelerator input in favour of the

brake if both pedals are depressed simultaneously.

And since the Smartbrake system is an intricate element of the Lancer's safety specification, it's now timely to point out the standard safety equipment in the SEi model.

Active Stability Control is Mitsubishi's proprietary electronic stability program, which is supplemented by the multi-mode anti-lock brakes and the electronic brakeforce distribution system.

Additionally, SEi Lancer is equipped with dual front, side and driver's knee airbags, plus curtain airbags for rear cabin occupants, plus the safety advantages of RISE body design.

It's not often this last is explained, so allow us: RISE stands for Reinforced Impact Safety Evolution.

Put simply, a rigid safety shell absorbs energy in strategically located crumple zones, shielding all occupants from impact as well as providing a strong skeleton for the car's chassis, thereby enhancing the handling and inherent safety of the vehicle.

And all of this results in a healthy five-star safety rating from the Australian New Car Assessment Program – ANCAP.

Heart and soul of the Lancer SEi is the 2-litre MIVEC engine – a development reflecting Mitsubishi's concerns when it comes to fuel efficiency.

The 2-litre MIVEC replaces Mitsubishi's earlier obsession with a 2400cc displacement as the powerplant of choice.

Today, the 2.4-litre engines are peaked and tweaked to render maximum performance in VRx models as well as for other applications such as the Outlander SUV.

The 2-litre MIVECs are now the backbone of the Lancer and ASX Crossover lines with clever valve technology designed to maximise fuel efficiency.

At the same time of course, the engine has to deliver enough punch

From top to bottom: Racy looks; Rich specifications; Reverse cam; Readable dials; Right hand electric seats.

to contend with passing lanes and sustained, comfortable cruising, which explains the 115kW at peak 6000rpm and 201Nm of torque from 4250rpm.

It also explains Mitsubishi's trend towards CVT as the transmission of choice. You don't even realise it is a CVT until you call on all the power available, and could be forgiven for thinking the transmission is a particularly smooth, 6-speed auto (in fact it is a six-step CVT) with manual mode).

For all that the Mitsubishi Lancer SEi is well specified however, and at the promotional price, excellent value for money, there are a few shortcomings.

The air conditioning system is one of the noisier varieties and coupled with the road rumble from the 16-inch tyres (wrapped round the sparkly alloy rims), makes the whole package in desperate need of sound deadening.

Additionally, the Lancer feels light and it probably is to give you a very healthy 7.2 litres per 100km combined fuel figure, but there's 'light' and 'too light' when it comes to moving metal, with 'too light' being the consumer's least favourite.

There were also a few rattles in the tested car, which did not sit especially well given the standard of refinement found in the specification and equipment levels.

In terms of handling, the Lancer hugs the road well enough, but there were times when too much enthusiasm was tempered with a reminder that this car is not an Evo and therefore, should not be treated as such.

You can however, have a little bit of a 'play' with it to relieve long tedious drives and the car responds willingly enough. You can always tinker around with the manual mode if you want to.

For most cars, there is an all too frequent compromise between luxury and performance. It seems it is very hard to achieve both to everyone's satisfaction and certainly, when it comes



Just as comfortable in the back, thanks to leather and long legroom.

to fleet-focussed cars, there is the ever present budgetary consideration, which overrides both.

With the 2012 Lancer SEi, Mitsubishi has perhaps not built the perfect car, but it is a darn sight closer to being able to mix the two attributes mentioned above than most.

Given the spectacularly low retail of the Lancer SEi – albeit for a limited time only – Mitsubishi is to be highly commended for its ability to provide the balance of power and panache AND price.

Indeed, there would be very few players in the market able to offer what Mitsubishi is currently doing, and that's not even taking into consideration

the Diamond Advantage warranty: 10 year/160,000km powertrain warranty, 5 year/130,000 new vehicle warranty and five year premium Roadside Assist.

Now, put all of the above together and you come up with a car which is normally \$36,990, and that's not a bad price anyway.

But as we said, for a limited time, the price has been reduced to \$29,990 – insanely under the cost of the entry level model!

This suggests Mitsubishi is looking to seriously target the fleet market for 2012 – and with offers like this, the brand may very well get in before the bigger players. **CG**



**Mitsubishi Fleet Sales: Ted Heerdegen 021 122 9080**  
theerdegen@aucklandmotors.co.nz  
**Murray Davis 027 458 2019**  
mdavis@aucklandmotors.co.nz

Auckland Motors Mitsubishi  
686 Great South Road, Manukau City  
Phone 09 262 9020 www.aucklandmotors.co.nz

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