A spacious plugin SUV for under $36,000? The Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV



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- If you want a plug-in hybrid SUV that can fit a family of five but won’t cost you at least $50,000, the Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV is the only game in town.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Although the Outlander PHEV first went on sale in other markets in 2013, it only reached the US in 2018.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- From this angle it looks like a minivan.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Our test Outlander PHEV was the $41,495 GT spec, which means it was extra-loaded.

Jonathan Gitlin

- Can you believe this is the first press fleet car I've tested with CHAdeMO?
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Getting my fast charge on.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- 1.8 miles/kWh means the EPA estimate of 22 miles of EV range is just about spot on.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Energy consumption.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- More energy consumption.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Yet more energy consumption.
  Jonathan Gitlin

As you're no doubt bored of hearing—I know I am—the SUV-slash-crossover has ascended to a position of automotive supremacy. Customers, we're told, like the convenience of a hatch to load their luggage and the lofty driving position that trades center of gravity for situational awareness. In response, companies are cutting back on sedans, the station wagon is almost extinct, only a handful of minivans remain in production, and cars that a decade ago would be called hatchbacks are now classified crossovers. If you want to shift metal in the US then, you better get with that program.

Similarly, it's clear to all but the most motivated reasoners that business as usual is no longer sufficient when we're talking about carbon dioxide emissions. Many OEMs—particularly the European ones—thought that diesel engines were the answer. But we all know how that one turned out; time and again car companies have been caught cheating on the tests. Even if suppliers like Bosch say they have the technology to make the engines acceptably clean, public opinion has shifted to the point where the fuel is now simply unpalatable. The answer therefore *has* to be electrification—it's the only remaining

way for carmakers to meet Europe's incoming CO_2 rules that, if applied today, would see a company like VW Group fined 75 percent of its annual global profits.

All of this makes the relative paucity of plug-in hybrid SUVs on sale in 2019 a rather damning indictment of the industry. Here in the US the pickings are slim, particularly if you don't want something from a luxury automaker with a price tag starting in the $50,000 range. There's the Kia Niro PHEV and the Subaru Crosstrek Hybrid, although neither may be considered big enough by many American consumers… which leaves us with the Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV.

At this point, our international readers might be scratching their heads a little. You see, in regions beyond these shores, the Outlander PHEV isn't exactly new. In fact, it was unveiled at the 2012 (!) Paris Motor Show, went on sale the following year, and has gone on to become the best-selling plug-in hybrid in Europe, where over 100,000 have found homes. But Mitsubishi has been having a rough time here of late, particularly in the US, and so it took until 2018 for the model to go on sale here. (While you're mocking us for being late to the party, don't forget to also poke fun at the state of US broadband, our cellphone plan pricing, and the fact that we can't seem to do high-speed rail.)

But now it is on sale here, starting at $35,795 before you take the $5,836 IRS tax credit into account. In exchange, you get quite a lot of car, technically one that's classified as a compact SUV for reasons that escape me. There's nothing particularly compact about a vehicle that's 184.8 inches (4,694mm) long, 70.8 inches (1,798mm) wide, and 67.3 inches (1,709mm) tall.

One engine, two electric motors

Even though it's no spring chicken, the tech specs for the

powertrain are actually rather interesting. It uses an internal combustion engine and not one but two motor-generator units—one for each axle. What's more, the Outlander PHEV will work as either a series hybrid or a parallel hybrid (or as a pure EV, for as long as the battery lasts). In series hybrid mode, the naturally aspirated 2.0L four-cylinder internal combustion engine works as a generator, feeding the 12kWh lithium-ion battery pack as well as directly powering the electric motors when a sudden burst of acceleration is called for.

In parallel mode—cruising on a highway, for example—the engine can send its 117hp (87kW) and 137lb-ft (186Nm) direct to the front wheels, with the electric motors chipping in as, and when, the car's electronic brains decide that's necessary (like climbing a hill). Whether this ability to act as both series and parallel hybrid will enrage the people who find the Chevrolet Volt so objectionable on the same basis is unclear at the time I write this, but I'm looking forward to reading the comments to find out.

Both electric motors are rated at 60kW (80hp), but they are not identical. The front motor, mounted next to the internal combustion engine, is rated for 137Nm (101lb-ft) and is actually a smaller, lighter, souped-up version of the electric motor that powered the Mitsubishi i-MiEV. (This was coincidentally the first car I ever tested for Ars.) Meanwhile the rear electric motor is a beefier thing, rated at 195Nm (144lb-ft).

With a full (11.3 gallon/43L) tank of gas and a fully charged battery, the Outlander PHEV should have a range of 310 miles. On electricity alone, that drops to just 22 miles (35km) per the EPA rating. That's actually pretty accurate—in EV mode I averaged 1.8 miles/kWh. Recharging all 12kWh at 120V will take around eight hours, or half that at 240V. If you're in more of a hurry, you're in luck—Mitsubishi has included CHAdeMO DC Fast charging as standard; at 50kW, a battery will go from 0

to 80 percent in about 25 minutes. EPA-rated fuel economy is 74mpge when using gas and electricity, or 25mpg on gasoline alone.

- The Outlander PHEV uses nice materials in the cabin, but the design is a bit dated at this point.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- The main instrument display in all its glory.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- I don’t know who decided the button to control the multifunction screen on the main instrument display down here, but they are a monster.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Carbon fiber trim on the center console.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- There’s plenty of room in the back. And some 110v power outlets if you get the GT version.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- A voluminous cargo space, and some Rockford Fosgate speakers.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- The infotainment system.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- CarPlay and Android Auto are included.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- This is what it looks like if you listen to the radio.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- The iOS app you can use to monitor the car, as long as you’re within range of its WiFi.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- This tells you your battery status.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Call me churlish, but this kind of remote operation would be a lot more useful if it wasn’t dependent on being connected to the car by Wi-Fi.
  Jonathan Gitlin

- Let there be light.
  Jonathan Gitlin

Despite being labeled a compact SUV, the Outlander PHEV's interior is really quite spacious. Back seat passengers get 37.9 inches (963mm) of rear leg room, and there's no third row of seats. But there is a useful 30.4 cubic feet (860L), which expands to 62.8 cubic feet (1,595L) with the rear seats folded flat.

The cabin itself looks fine, and I rather liked the carbon fiber trim that adorned the center console and door cards, but there's no escaping the fact that it's a dated design at this point. But then the Outlander did go into production back in 2013, remember. I also liked the large paddles behind the steering wheel—you use these to alter the Outlander PHEV's energy regeneration level, which you can increase or decrease through five different levels. I was a bit less enamored by some of the ergonomics, particularly the decision to put the button that changes the multifunction display on the dashboard rather than on the (button-covered) steering wheel.

Even the base SEL trim is well equipped, with Android Auto, Apple CarPlay, and Sirius XM all standard on the 7-inch touchscreen infotainment system, plus heated front seats and leather front and back. On the ADAS (advanced driver assistance systems) front, the SEL comes with blind spot monitors, lane change assist, rear cross-traffic alerts, and a hill start function. If you opt for the $41,495 GT spec Outlander PHEV—as in the case of our test vehicle—you also get LED fog- and headlights, a power sunroof, an uprated Rockford Fosgate sound system, heated steering wheel, adaptive cruise control, forward collision warning, lane departure warning, and 360-degree parking cameras.

Finally, all Outlander PHEVs also get access to a remote smartphone app. As is the convention, this allows you to do things like check the vehicle status, turn on the lights or

the air conditioning, and so on. However, unlike other systems we've tested, the Outlander PHEV's system only works via Wi-Fi. That means you have to be within range of the vehicle's Wi-Fi antenna—and be connected to it—to be able to interact with it via your phone. That was probably quite cool back in 2013, but six years later it feels a bit like a time capsule from another era.

Listing image by Jonathan Gitlin

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