



AROUND THE BLOCK

Outlander an Outlier No Longer



2007 Mitsubishi Outlander LS

By NICK KURCZEWSKI
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TESTED: 2007 [Mitsubishi Outlander LS](#)

WHAT IS IT? Compact crossover sport utility wagon.

HOW MUCH? Base ES, \$21,995; LS as tested, \$26,135.

WHAT DRIVES IT? 3-liter V-6; six-speed automatic; all-wheel drive.
(Front drive also available.)

IS IT SAFE? All Outlanders have six air bags, including head-protection curtains. In seven-passenger models, the side curtains extend to cover the third row. Also standard are antilock brakes, tire-pressure monitors and electronic stability control.

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HOW THIRSTY? The [E.P.A.](#) rates the all-wheel-drive model at 19 m.p.g. in town, 26 on the highway.

ALTERNATIVES: [Ford Escape](#), \$26,005; [Toyota RAV4](#) \$25,630; [Hyundai Santa Fe](#) \$25,845. (All similarly equipped.)

AFTER spending years as a bench warmer among compact crossover utilities, the Mitsubishi Outlander is finally making a serious bid for the A-team.

Redesigned for 2007, the Outlander combines carlike dynamics, S.U.V.-lite styling and a reasonable price tag — as long as you don't get carried away with big-ticket option packages.

Gone are the awkward looks and underpowered four-cylinder engine of the first-generation Outlander. The redesigned version comes in three trim levels: ES, LS and XLS. The ES comes only with front-wheel drive, but the LS and the XLS can be had with all-wheel drive as well. Standard on all versions is a 220-horsepower 3-liter V-6 and a six-speed automatic transmission.

The Outlander is based on the [Mitsubishi Lancer](#) sedan, the same architecture found under the Jeep Compass and Patriot and the [Dodge Caliber](#). In Europe, PSA Peugeot Citroën even sells rebadged versions of the Outlander as the Peugeot 4007 and Citroën C-Crosser.

While it lacked a chic French label, my LS test vehicle looked good in eye-catching aqua metallic paint, atop chunky 16-inch alloy wheels. The clear taillight covers are a trendy touch, copying a similar design on the much more expensive [Lexus RX 350](#).

Air-conditioning, power windows and locks, cruise control and a 140-watt 6-speaker audio system are all standard on the LS. The 5-year, 60,000-mile basic warranty is coupled with a limited powertrain warranty of 10 years or 100,000 miles. The test model's only significant option was the \$1,740 Sun and Sound package, which includes a power glass sunroof, a six-month subscription to Sirius Satellite Radio and a bass-thumping Rockford Fosgate stereo with nine speakers and a 10-inch subwoofer. Many popular options, including a navigation system, come in similarly expensive packages.

The Outlander casts roughly the same shadow as other crossovers that have grown larger lately, including the Toyota RAV4 and Hyundai Santa Fe. But if you have a tight garage, note that the Outlander, at 182.7 inches, is about six inches longer than the Ford Escape.

Reverse-challenged drivers should note that the Outlander lacks rear back-up sensors.

On quiet suburban streets, or on the busy highways of northern New Jersey, the Outlander delivered a refined ride along with carlike manners. It is among the more nimble vehicles in its class, though the steering can sometimes seem a bit lifeless.

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The optional all-wheel-drive system is controlled by a dial on the center console. In fuel-saving 2WD mode, all power is sent to the front wheels. Clicking the dial to 4WD Auto sends 15 percent of torque to the rear at all times, and up to 60 percent when needed. In 4WD Lock, the front and rear axles split the power 50-50 for extra grip.

In the XLS, the driver is free to shift gears using magnesium paddles behind the steering wheel. The XLS, which starts around \$24,500, also has a Bluetooth cellphone link, automatic climate control and leather seats.

Mitsubishi has somehow squeezed a third row of seats into the XLS, but the rearmost bench works only for children (or adults you dislike), and when in use it eats up all but 15 cubic feet of cargo space. (When the third row is folded into the floor, the cargo hold jumps to 36 cubic feet.) A clamshell-style tailgate enhances the Outlander's utility. The lower half extends well into the rear bumper, making it easier to load heavy luggage.

The Outlander's interior is straightforward, and you don't need a master's in hieroglyphics to operate the knobs that control heating and air-conditioning. But some of the plastics in the cabin, especially the door panels, look cheap. Rear air vents were also noticeably absent — and especially missed during several extremely hot summer days.

The small crossover segment has boomed since the first — and thoroughly forgettable — Outlander came out. The new version is hardly a superstar, but it is definitely in the game.

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