

Mitsubishi Carisma

Featuring 1.8GLX 4-door



MITSUBISHI HAS BEEN SOMETHING OF a latecomer to wedding a European partner. From around the middle of 1995, though, the fruits of a 1991 tripartite get-together with Volvo and the Dutch government started appearing from the NedCar factory at Born in Holland. The result is a substantially reinforced launch pad for Mitsubishi sales into Europe, while neatly side-stepping the thorny old problem of import quotas in the process.

Volvo's S40/V40 duo (a mid-sized saloon and an estate-like five-door "wagon") and this Mitsubishi Carisma roll down the same production lines, yet this is no mere badge engineering operation. The two share a common floorpan and production facilities, it's true, but apart from a few isolated components, the cars – and power trains, in particular – are distinctly different. Marketing and image-wise, too, each maker does its own thing, with Volvo striving to persuade us that the S40/V40 offers serious BMW rivalry, while Mitsubishi is playing a slightly more down-to-earth, value-for-money hand.

The Carisma, then, offers four-door saloon or five-door hatchback body options, powered by Mitsubishi's own 1.6- or 1.8-litre 16-valve engines

(developing 89 and 114bhp respectively), with a choice of five-speed manual or computer-controlled, "thinking" four-speed automatic gearbox on all versions. Three trim levels complete the permutations in the 44-model line-up, with option packs catering for the addition of an electric sunroof, passenger's side airbag and anti-lock brakes, as desired. In overall length, both the Volvo and this 4cm (1½in) shorter Carisma justify inclusion in the Mondeo and Vectra-sized upper-medium sector. In reality, though, the back seat accommodation of both cars lies on the cosy side of average for this class. While the Volvos sport 1.8- and two-litre petrol engines plus a diesel (the petrol units, incidentally, are essentially the Volvo 850's "five-potter" with one cylinder lopped off the end), Mitsubishi currently offers its own petrol-fed pair, each 200ccs smaller in capacity.

The smaller engines cause little hardship, though, judging by the 1.8's refreshingly torquey delivery. Admittedly, lowish overall gearing helps, but the 1.8's hearty mid-range "grunt" makes it one of the lustiest 16-valve engines we've ever encountered; it lifts its skirts in fifth gear, for example, quicker than the 1.8 Vectra manages in fourth.

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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
Through the gears		1.6	3.5	6.1	9.1
In 5th gear		5.1	10.0	14.9	20.6
In 4th gear		3.7	7.3	11.4	15.5

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5th/4th SPEED RANGES	10.2/7.7		9.8/7.7		
		10.0/7.3		10.6/8.2	

Maximum speeds

Revs per minute	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	1	3	5
		6500*		6800	5920	32	82	124
						53	117	
								mph

*for best acceleration

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Worst/best mpg	27/41
Typical mpg overall	36
Realistic tank range*	53 litres/420 miles

*based on fuel gauge, warning lamp and filling station experience

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type front-mounted, transverse four cylinder; iron block/alloy head; five main bearings

Size 81 x 89mm = 1834cc

Power 114bhp at 5500rpm

Torque 119 lb ft at 4500rpm

Valves belt-driven overhead camshaft actuating four valves per cylinder via roller rocker arms

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point injection with integrated, distributorless ignition. 60-litre tank, with low-level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual, front-wheel drive

Mph per 1000rpm 20.9 in 5th, 17.2 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts

with coil springs. Rear: independent by multi-link (twin transverse links and trailing arm) and coil springs. Telescopic dampers all round, with front anti-roll bar

Steering speed-related power-assisted rack and pinion with 3.2 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 10.5m between kerbs, with 16.2m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5½J steel with 185/65R14 86H tyres (Dunlop SP Sport 200 on test car); 5½J alloy with 195/60R14 tyres on 1.8GLS

Brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear, with vacuum servo. Electronic three-channel anti-lock system (combined option on all models) fitted on test car

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience (the more black blobs the better)

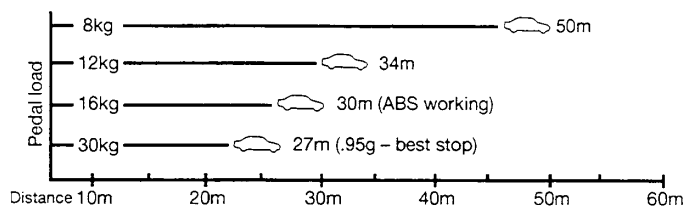
Seatbelts	front ●●●●○ rear ●●○○○	Door locking	●●●●○
Head restraints	front ●●●●○ rear ●●○○○	central locking?	☒
Interior	safety padding ●●●○○	remote control?	☒
driver's airbag?	☒	auto window closure?	☒
other airbags?	☐	deadlocks?	☒
side impact protection	●●●○○	Luggage	
Fuel anti-spillage	●●●○○	secure from interior/hidden from view	●●○○○
		Alarm	●●●●○
		engine immobilised?	☒

☒ standard on test car ☐ factory fitted option ☒ not available

BRAKES

Pedal feel ●●○○○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●●○○ Handbrake ●●●●○

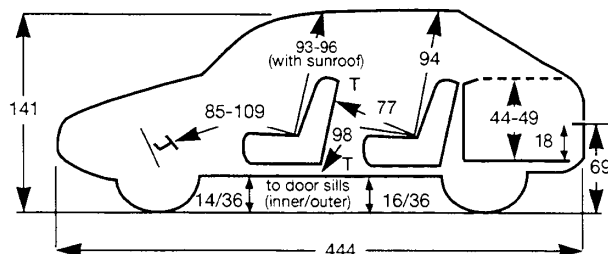
Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with ABS)
(A good-to-average best stop is about 28m at 20-30kg pedal load)



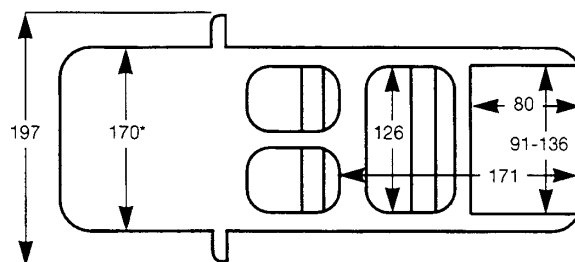
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
11kg at start of test, 14kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

MEASUREMENTS FOR 4-DOOR

Centimetres



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



*with mirrors folded

Through-the-gears sprinting reveals similar liveliness, with the 1.8's 30-70mph dash in 9sec not only pretty respectable in its own right, but also topping the class average by about 1½sec. The gear lever (although a touch weightier than some of the ultra-light, "click-clacky" shifts on Japanese cars) does little to discourage such boy-racer tactics, though the boomy engine noise that surfaces beyond about 4000rpm *does*.

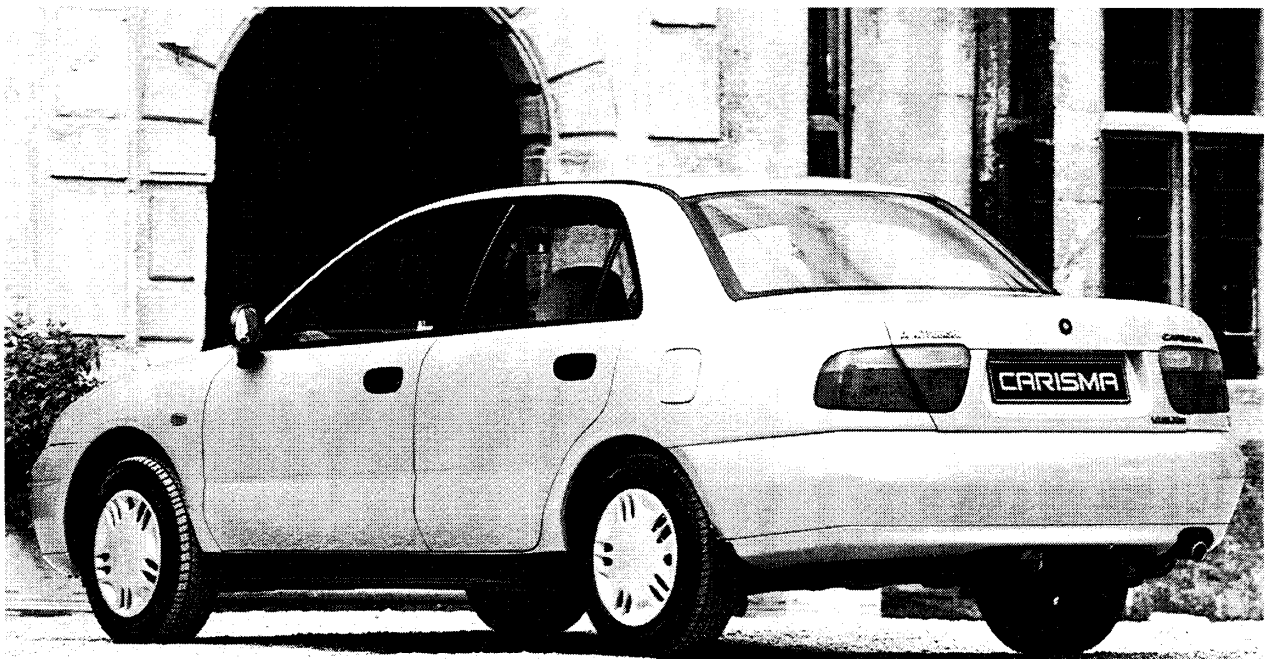
Given the Carisma's modest kerb weight and willing engine, the 36mpg we averaged didn't quite fulfil expectations. It's still a respectable result for a lively upper-medium saloon, but some way short of the high-g geared Vectra's 38½mpg or the outstandingly miserly Toyota Carina's 42½mpg.

It's hard to fault things from behind the wheel, with light, easy controls, an adaptable driving position that feels just right, together with an attractive curvy fascia. This gives pride of place to heating and audio controls up top, but also houses a cup-holder tray and useful storage areas for nick-nacks in front of the gear lever. The front seats' lumbar support could be better,

however, while the hard steering wheel rim and thickish windscreen pillars also attracted some mild criticism.

The Carisma handles neatly and surefootedly, but there's a scarcity of flair in the way it goes about it compared with class acts like the Peugeot 406 or Mondeo – a little short on *charisma*, dare we say? Ride quality, too, is a mite disappointing. Bigger lumps and bumps are smoothed out quite effectively, but there's a firm underlying jigglyness on all but the smoothest of surfaces, with the low-speed agitation most noticeable over sharp-edged faults around town.

Space and comfort are both quite plentiful in the front, but the Carisma's relatively skimpy wheelbase, combined with a flat, acutely raked back seat, means those behind fare less well. The space on offer isn't seriously deficient, but as our rivals table shows, the class-leading Carina accommodates longer legs significantly better. Despite bulky wheelarches, the load area is reasonably generous, handling all but extreme demands on the load-lugging front. Naturally, the saloon misses out on the hatchback's versatility in



Likes ... and gripes

- | | |
|--|--|
| Lovely torquey engine ... | but noisy when extended and prominent road roar |
| Accurate, easy-to-read dials ... | but speedo lacks 30, 50, 70mph markings |
| Transponder-key immobiliser ... | but boot not secure from cabin; alarm extra, too |
| Lots of creature comforts and storage up front ... | but front door pockets stingily slim |
| "Fine tuneable" driver's seat thigh support ... | but back seat occupants fare less well |

this respect, but its split-folding backrests provide a fair-sized through-load aperture for making a getaway with lengthy home improvement purchases. The cargo area can't be secured against access from within the cabin, however.

Because it offers a well-equipped upper-medium saloon (or hatchback) for the price of one a size smaller, the Carisma's value-for-money approach gets you a lot of "metal for your money". All models sport a rev counter, central locking, power steering, headlamp load-levelling and split-folding rear seats, together with a height-adjustable steering wheel and driver's seat, plus a quartet of head restraints. Mid-level GLX trim adds a left footrest, panel-light dimmer, a pair of cup holders, electric mirrors and powered windows all round, though our test car's electric tilt-and-slide sunroof, passenger airbag and anti-lock brakes add over £1500 via the Diamond Option Pack.

Safety and security aren't overlooked, either, with a driver's airbag supplementing the height-adjustable pre-tensioned front seatbelts with so-called "web brakes". An electronic engine immobiliser is also standard on all versions, and helps to net the Carisma competitive insurance group ratings (7 for the 1.6, 9 on this 1.8GLX and 10 for a top-of-the-shop 1.8GLS) – despite the absence of deadlocks and the alarm being a dealer-fit option.

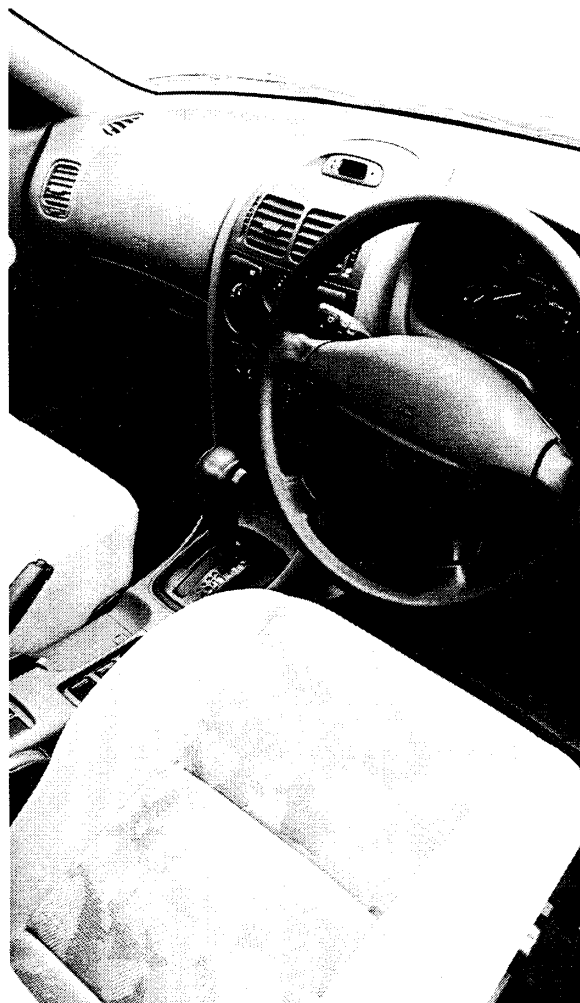
There's little to criticise in the fit and finish of what comes out of the NedCar plant, although one or two areas are a little shy of the quality enjoyed in, say, a 406 or Mondeo – the annoyingly elusive trim creak from the rear parcel shelf on our test car, for example. Road noise is rather prominent, too, especially on coarsely chipped surfaces. All things considered, though, the Carisma could happily wear a Made in Japan sticker, and there's the added reassurance of Mitsubishi's only recently rivalled three-year, unlimited mileage warranty.

VERDICT

On superficial scrutiny the Carisma looks to offer modern, Mondeo-sized motoring from the outside, yet the back seat appears distinctly cosy up against

the accommodation champions in this class. Dynamically, too, the restless ride, intrusive road roar and boomy engine come up short of the supreme competence offered by the Carisma's state-of-the-art rivals.

On the other hand, performance, equipment and ease at the wheel are present in copious quantities. Combined with the Carisma's keen pricing, the result is a very acceptable, well-equipped upper-medium car for the cost of a lower-medium one. And that should ring the value-for-money bell in anyone's book.



HOW THE CARISMA COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (m/kg)	Maximum legroom – front (cm)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (cm)	Steering turns/circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
MITSUBISHI CARISMA 1.8GLX	1834/114	3345	9.1	20.6/15.5	36	27/30*	109	98/77	10.5/3.2 (p)	444
Ford Mondeo 1.8i 16v	1796/115	3240	10.7	26.3/17.2	36½/2	27/16*	109	102/71	10.4/3.0 (p)	448
Hyundai Lantra 1.8CD	1836/124	3710	10.1	21.0/15.8	34½/2	30½/2/14	109	96/67	10.4/3.0 (p)	436
Peugeot 406 1.8LX	1761/112	3300	10.5	27.3/16.9	34½/2	26½/2/18	110	99/78	11.0/3.2 (p)	456
Toyota Carina E 1.8	1762/103	3030	10.9	27.5/17.9	42½/2	28/12	109	108/76	10.8/3.2 (p)	453
Vauxhall Vectra 1.8	1796/115	2940	11.1	28.6/20.8	38½/2	24/28*	111	101/75	10.9/3.0 (p)	448
Volvo S40 2.0	1948/140	3150	10.0	26.7/18.1	33	25/23*	113	99/75	10.5/2.9 (p)	448
All 4-door models except 5-door Mondeo						* with ABS			(p) power steering	