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Mitsubishi Space Wagon 2.0GLXi



WHETHER YOU CALL THEM PEOPLE carriers or, more commonly these days, multi-purpose vehicles, the hybrids which bridge the gap between vans-with-seats and normal estate cars are becoming increasingly popular.

Their tall, boxy lines and re-arrangeable seating are fun for picnics and family outings. Indeed, the space and versatility they offer inside and, often, a couple of extra seats, too, also give them a decisive advantage over conventional estate cars.

With the ability to carry up to seven people within compact dimensions, together with its keen price, the Space Wagon has proved a popular example of the breed. Although the first-generation MPV, this latest version makes significant strides on its predecessor in both these areas. But it isn't just one model, there are two distinct versions on offer.

The four-door Space Wagon's third, forward-facing row of seats provides seating for seven, but there's also a slightly smaller, five-seater version

called the Space Runner. This is about 9in shorter and doesn't have the extra row of seats. But it has the same attractive styling and its back seat can be completely removed, making it the better load-carrier of the two. Its sliding rear door on the nearside is a great help in this respect, too, although you get only a driver's door on the other side.

Originally, both models were powered by a fuel-injected, 1.8-litre, 16-valve engine producing 121bhp, but from mid-1992 onwards, the Space Wagon acquired a 2-litre power unit, offering an extra 10bhp. Both versions have front-wheel drive via a five-speed manual gearbox, although four-speed automatic transmission is optionally available on either model.

The new Space Wagon is bigger and quite a bit heavier than the old one, but 2-litre power gives it lively, car-like performance that's significantly quicker than its predecessor. Its 113mph top speed is a little down compared with equivalent saloons and estates (due to a greater frontal area), but 30 to

Living with the Space Wagon . . .

70mph acceleration in about 9sec is lively by any standards.

It's not all raw, top-end power, either. The Space Wagon will trundle along quite happily at barely more than tickover, yet its strong, mid-range pull feels far more muscular than the 4750rpm for maximum torque suggests.

There's a bit of a step up into the cabin, but once there, the higher-than-normal seating gives the driver and passengers an excellent view of the scenery. It's not the slightest bit intimidating to drive, though, with light power steering, powerful brakes and an easy gearchange pleasantly surprising many first-time drivers.

Although the Space Wagon handles like a car, there's understandably a little more body roll when driving briskly. Ride comfort is generally good, too, but it tends to jar a little over pot-holes when lightly laden. Road noise is quite prominent.

Despite the new model being both quicker and heavier, we're quite impressed by its fuel economy. It averaged 31mpg in our tests – pretty impressive for a big, lively multi-seater. This is as good as we'd expect from comparable estate cars.

Inside, the three rows of seats split, fold and recline to provide almost limitless variations of seating or cargo-carrying. There's a generous selection of drink-holders, storage boxes and cubby holes, too.

Because the Space Wagon's sliding centre row of seats can't be removed, maximum cargo space is a little restricted. Limited legroom also means that the rearmost seats are best suited to children and, yes, there's nearly always a fight over who's going to sit there!

There's no shortage of creature comforts on the Space Wagon. Standard items include central locking, electric windows and door mirrors, headlamp

washers, and head restraints for all except the middle seat in the centre row. A sunroof isn't included, but an electric one comes as part of the Diamond Option pack, which also includes a pair of roof bars and a roller-blind cover for the load area.

As with the previous model, the Space Wagon is well built, generously equipped and provides versatile accommodation for up to seven people. It may not be the roomiest of MPVs, but it looks attractive, it's great fun and is certainly one of the most affordable.

If you're after an estate car but fancy the luxury of extra room now and again, the Space Wagon or slightly smaller Space Runner both deserve serious consideration.

At the Wheel

Driving position

You sit higher and more erect than in a car, but this gives a feeling of being well in command at the wheel. The steering wheel is adjustable for rake, but surprisingly there are no adjustments for height or lumbar support. The front seats' prominent side bolsters give excellent lateral support – too much so, perhaps, for those of broader build.

Controls and displays

Most of the controls are handily placed, but the hi-tech, all-push-button radio (sited down in front of the gear lever) is fiddly to adjust. Ultra-light power steering makes the Space Wagon just as easy around town as on the open road, although it gives little feel of what the front wheels are up to. The cable-operated gearshift proves almost too light, feeling a little notchy as a result. Although the dials and switches are easy to get along with, the speedo and mileometer could be more accurate.

Vision

Although the lofty cabin affords a good all-round view, you need to remember when reversing that the rear bumper projects 6in or so; three rows of head restraints don't help much in this respect, either. The wipers clear a useful area of the big windscreen, while the rear one offers continuous or intermittent settings – a nice touch. Standard equipment includes headlamp washers and electrically operated and heated door mirrors. Given its "crew bus" capabilities, though, slightly bigger door mirrors wouldn't be out of place. The facia-mounted headlamp beam trimmer shown in the handbook would have been useful, too.

Driver satisfaction

The Space Wagon couldn't be expected to out-handle the likes of hot hatches, but it can still be hustled along far more deftly than its appearance might suggest. There's a fair amount of body roll if the cornering gets too enthusiastic, but it's car-like handling and lusty, free-revving engine prove just as enjoyable when pottering as they do at a more urgent pace.

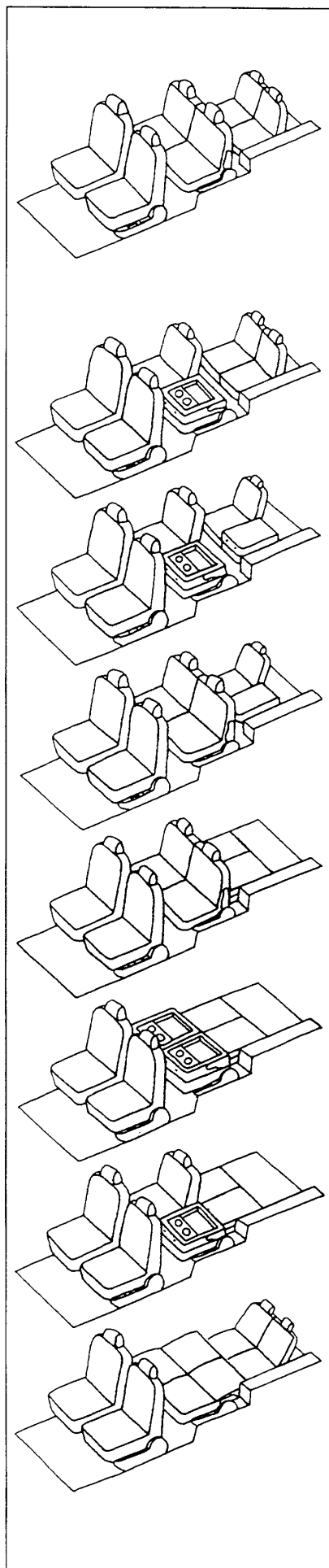
Space & Comfort

Getting in and out

The higher cabin and wide-opening doors ease entry and exit for the less agile, while bright courtesy lamps at each end prove helpful at night. There's the convenience of central locking when it comes to opening or shutting up shop, with a fuel-flap release trigger alongside the driver's seat. The large tailgate isn't too much of a handful; it's covered by the central locking, too, but can be key-opened on its own, if required.

Seating and ride comfort

The front seats don't swivel round, and the sliding centre row is fixed, but there's precious little



else that can't be achieved – from seven-seater minibus duties at one end of the scale, to passable overnight accommodation at the other. Passenger space and comfort are best in the front, deteriorating as you progress rearwards, although the cosy little two-seater at the back is popular with youngsters.

Ride quality is really quite good, but the Space Wagon loses a little dignity over pot-holes when it's lightly laden. Road roar can be prominent over coarse surfaces, but mechanical and wind noise are both well suppressed, making long runs reasonably untaxing.

Heating and ventilation

Three rows of seats and extensive glazing place a heavy burden on keeping the passengers warm and the windows clear, but the Space Wagon's straightforward and efficient system is well up to the task. We're pleased to note footwell outlets for all three rows, while up front, the only real gripes are that fan assistance is a bit feeble on the lower settings and the facia vents turn warm rather too readily. In standard form, the Space Wagon comes without a sunroof, but the Diamond Option version we tested adds a large electric tilt-and-slide glass sunroof, together with a pair of roof bars and a roller-blind load area cover, for about £700 extra.

Luggage and oddments stowage

With all seven seats in use, there's not much room for suitcases. But what the Space Wagon lacks in space, it largely compensates for by its versatile, multi-adjustable seating. The centre row slides back and forth, allowing legroom and load space to be traded off, while both rows have full split-folding and reclining arrangements, with picnic trays built into the centre row seatbacks.

For maximum cargo capacity, the rearmost pair fold flat to form a solid load deck, level with the folded-down centre row, but this

fixed centre row compromises "furniture van" capacity a little. There's a selection of drinks holders, storage boxes and cubby holes and an area to hide valuables beneath the load area.

Money Matters

Value for money

At its current price the Space Wagon runs rings round conventional estate cars for all-round practicality and versatility, yet costs little or no extra to buy and run – excellent value by any standards. The Space Runner does better still, though, with a £1500-cheaper price tag in return for its two fewer seats and only slightly less powerful 1.8-litre engine.

Fuel economy

Despite increased size and weight over the old model and the addition of a catalyser, the Space Wagon returned a creditable 31mpg overall in our tests – an impressive result that shows virtually no penalty over its carburettor-fed predecessor. Almost 40mpg is attainable on longer runs with restraint, while the reliable gauge, low-level warning lamp and reasonably generous tank capacity allow almost 400 miles between refills.

Warranty and servicing

In addition to the usual six-year anti-rust warranty, the Space Wagon and Space Runner are further supported by a generous (although no longer unrivalled) three-year/unlimited-mileage mechanical warranty and three-year pan-European breakdown and recovery assistance.

Underbonnet, routine DIY level checks present few problems, while servicing entails an initial 600-mile visit, with subsequent visits due annually or every 9000 miles. Insurance will be slightly more expensive on these new models – both attract a Group 13 rating, one higher than before.

Safety

Accident avoidance

Although power steering provides little feedback, the Space Wagon's reassuring brakes and generally car-like handling help to make it feel surprisingly wieldy. ABS isn't available so far, but the progressive, well-weighted set-up provides powerful braking (even when lightly laden), with a welcome reluctance to lock the front wheels in all but the severest of stops.

Injury prevention

All six outboard seats have effective head restraints and three-point inertia reel seatbelts, with height-adjustable shoulder mounts for the front belts. Elsewhere,

items such as safety padding and belt runs look reasonably reassuring, and the doors are fitted with side impact bars for additional occupant protection.

Security

Central locking reduces the risk of leaving a door unlocked, but the Space Wagon's "one-box" design affords little protection for the contents once a thief has gained access. The roller-blind load cover prevents the luggage from being left on open display and comes with two sets of mountings, allowing it to be used with the vehicle in both five- and seven-seater modes.

Additional anti-theft protection is left to the customer's discretion, with a comprehensive range of dealer-fit anti-theft alarms

available from Mitsubishi's Diamond accessory range.

Durability

Build quality and reliability

Our test car demonstrated customary faultless Japanese build quality, with deep, lustrous paintwork and immaculate fit and finish, inside and out. Pale grey plastic and upholstery reinforce the interior's undeniably Oriental flavour, but there's little else to criticise. Even though it doesn't quite emulate Audi's hewn-from-solid feel, everything feels as though it's made to stay together. Mitsubishi's reliability record gives cause for nothing but optimism, with further peace of mind assured by that generous warranty.



HOW IT COMPARES

(Maximum seating capacity in brackets)

	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/ kneerom – rear (in)	Steering turns/ circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Mitsubishi Space Wagon 2.0GLXi (c) (7)	1997/131	113	9.3	21.6/15.6	31	102/50	40	39 ¹ / ₄ /29 ¹ / ₄	3.2/38 (p)	177 ³ / ₄
Fiat Tempra 2.0ie SX Station Wagon (c) (5)	1995/115	118	11.2	25.6/17.0	31	75/70*	41	40 ¹ / ₂ /30	3.1/34 ³ / ₄ (p)	176
Land Rover Discovery 2.5Tdi T/diesel (7)	2495/111	86	23.5	38.1/25.2	28	85/50	41 ¹ / ₄	39/29 ¹ / ₂	3.7/39 ¹ / ₄ (p)	178
Renault 21 Savanna 2.0GTX Family (7)	1995/120	120	9.9	24.4/18.0	31 ¹ / ₂	102/45*	42 ¹ / ₂	39 ¹ / ₂ /30	3.3/35 ³ / ₄ (p)	184 ³ / ₄
Toyota Previa 2.4 Automatic (c) (8)	2438/133	105	12.8	NA (auto)	22 ¹ / ₂	101/35	41 ¹ / ₂	36/32 ¹ / ₂	3.5/39 ¹ / ₂ (p)	187
Mitsubishi Space Wagon 1.8GLX (7) †	1755/89	95	15.2	36.0/24.4	31 ¹ / ₂	95/35	40	40/27	3.1/36 ³ / ₄ (p)	169
(c) with catalyser † previous model						* with ABS		(p) with power steering		



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 85mm bore x 88mm stroke = 1997cc. Iron block and aluminium alloy head; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 10.0:1

Valve gear single belt-driven overhead camshaft actuating four valves per cylinder via roller rocker arms with hydraulic tappets

Fuel system Mitsubishi ECI-Multi electronic multi-point fuel injection, three-way regulated catalyser and lambda sensor. 60-litre (13.2-gallon) tank, with low-fuel warning lamp. Fuel required: unleaded only, 95 octane (accepts 91 octane with reduced performance)

Ignition system fully programmed electronic, integrated with fuel injection system, with knock sensing via integral coil/distributor

Maximum power 131bhp at 6000rpm

Maximum torque 130 lb ft at 4750rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch 8.5in dry plate; diaphragm spring; hydraulically operated. Pedal load/travel: 22 lb/6in

Gearbox 5-speed (all synchromesh) and reverse.

Ratios: first 3.45, second 1.95, third 1.28, fourth 0.94, fifth 0.76 and reverse 3.08:1

Electronically controlled 4-speed automatic transmission available on Space Wagon and Space Runner

Final drive 4.59:1, to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm 19.9 in top, 16.1 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 3510 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts with coil springs, lower wishbones and an anti-roll bar. Rear: independent by semi-trailing arms, coil springs and an anti-roll bar. Dampers: load-dependent telescopic all round

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion with 3.2 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 38ft between kerbs, with 59³/₄ft circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5¹/₂JJ x 14 steel, with 185/70R14 88H tyres (Bridgestone SF321 on test car)

Brakes 10.1in ventilated discs front, 9.0in drums rear, with vacuum servo. Anti-lock control not available