

CAR AND DRIVER



PREVIEW TEST

2008 MITSUBISHI LANCER GTS

AN EVERYDAY SEDAN WITH A SPORTY DEMEANOR.

BY CSABA CSERE

» With the recent doubling of crude-oil prices, Mitsubishi's ninth-generation Lancer is arriving at a time of renewed interest in smallish sedans. As with most new vehicles, this latest Lancer is stiffer and more powerful than its predecessor, but unlike most of its

competitors, it hasn't grown much in size.

The biggest increase is in width, which is up 2.5 inches to 69.3, about the same as a Honda Civic or Mazda 3. The previous Lancer was already one of the longest vehicles in the segment at 180.5

inches, so the new one actually shrinks a fraction, although the body rides on a 1.3-inch-longer wheelbase. The result is an interior that's about the same size as its predecessor, which was already one of the roomiest.

This interior is not only roomy



VEHICLE TYPE: front-engine, front-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 4-door sedan

ESTIMATED BASE PRICE: \$17,000

ENGINE TYPE: DOHC 16-valve inline-4, aluminum block and head, port fuel injection
Displacement 122 cu in, 1998cc
Power (SAE net) 152 bhp @ 6000 rpm
Torque (SAE net) 146 lb-ft @ 4250 rpm

TRANSMISSION: 5-speed manual

DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase: 103.7 in **Length:** 179.9 in
Width: 69.3 in **Height:** 58.7 in
Curb weight: 3050 lb

C/D TEST RESULTS:

Zero to 60 mph 7.8 sec
Zero to 100 mph 22.5 sec
Street start, 5-60 mph 8.3 sec
Standing ¼-mile 16.3 sec @ 87 mph
Braking, 70-0 mph 170 ft
Roadholding,
200-ft-dia skidpad 0.84 g

FUEL ECONOMY:

EPA city driving 21 mpg
EPA highway driving 29 mpg

by the numbers but also fits humans well. The driving position is excellent, even though the steering column doesn't telescope. The rear seat has a comfortable chair-height position and decent head- and legroom. Overall, interior styling is attractive but not lavish, with minimal padding where your elbows touch the doors and console.

On the other hand, the Lancer comes standard with seven airbags, adding a driver's knee bag to the usual front, side, and curtain inflatable shields. Mitsubishi has also made standard a trip computer and a one-touch-up driver's window on every Lancer. Options include a nav system with a 30GB hard drive for storing music, a killer stereo with 650 watts, and a keyless entry and ignition system. Economy cars

are far from austere penalty boxes these days.

They're also far from boring. Power for the '08 Lancer comes from a 2.0-liter version of the four-cylinder engine family that also powers the Dodge Caliber. With 152 horsepower, this engine is up 32 ponies from its predecessor. Torque is also up about 10 percent, to 146 pound-feet. Coupled to a five-speed manual, this is sufficient urge to push the Lancer to 60 mph in 7.8 seconds, which is about the current class average for econoboxes.

Where the Lancer shines is when the road gets twisty. Not only is the new model's structure some 50 percent stiffer than its predecessor, but it also has a track that's more than two inches wider and a thoroughly reworked

suspension with increased travel, improved geometry, and substantially stiffer springs and shocks—even on the DE and ES trim levels. The result is a much more responsive and controlled ride when you are rushing along.

We thoroughly wrung out a top-of-the-line—for now—GTS model (with 18-inch wheels and a sport-tuned suspension; Evo and Ralliart versions are anticipated) in California's San Rafael Mountains and were delighted by the machine's excellent combination of balance and grip. The optional CVT, when operating in paddle-shift manual mode, blipped through the gears like a proper formula car.

For those who want their entry-level sedan on the sporty side, this new Lancer will be worth a long look.