

ASX goes diesel auto

One of the better light SUVs out there finally gets the diesel automatic option New Zealand needs and it deserves, writes DAVE MOORE.

It's a bit like London buses, which are famous for being absent most of the time and then all of a sudden a whole raft of them boxes into view and you're spoiled for choice. This time last year, you could count the number of Japanese SUVs with diesel engines on the fingers of a Yakushi's hand, and if you wanted to top up the number of automatics – the preferred transmission in every segment – you were just about out of luck. The excellent Nissan X-trail and Mazda CX-5 were about all you could opt for, though if you wanted to go European Skoda and Volkswagen offered some diesel automatic crossovers for slightly more than a Japanese car budget, while Audi, BMW and Land Rover could supply the goods if you had more money to spend.

The good news is that in the past six months Toyota has brought-in its RAV4 with diesel and auto, so has Mitsubishi with its up-to-seven-seater Outlander, while Ford, albeit sourcing from China, has come up with a Kuga that offers diesel and automatic, too. New Zealand's big favourite the Subaru Legacy Outback has previously offered diesel power but with manual only transmission, and now that's offering a self-shifter in the form of a rather good CVT option.

Mitsubishi is adding even more choice this month, with the arrival of the 2.2-litre automatic turbodiesel version of its ASX, which is known as the Outlander Sport on some markets.

There's a touch of irony about this. As part of a mutually beneficial deal, Mitsubishi's ASX is cleverly reskinned as PSA

group's Citroën Aircross and Peugeot's 4008, giving the French concern a proven pair of two and four wheel drive SUVs and saving them the time and money involved with developing their own, meanwhile Mitsubishi enjoys improved costs through the amortisation possible with bigger numbers and everyone is happy.

The irony comes from the fact that PSA – acknowledged master of diesel power – is not offering a diesel version of its Peugeot and Citroën ASX spin-offs, while Mitsubishi is, and with an automatic to boot.

Priced at \$41,990 for the entry-point vehicle and \$44,990 for the all-the-fruits top-line, the ASX diesel is the least expensive of all Japanese and European turbodiesel 4x4 automatic soft-roaders.

The new ASX 4WD diesel automatic uses Mitsubishi's 2.2L four-cylinder turbocharged intercooled diesel engine from the Outlander, coupled to a six-speed transmission which offers a Sport Mode. It delivers 112kW at 3500



Mitsubishi ASX diesel: City slicker and country cousin in one compelling package.

rpm and 366Nm of torque from 1500 to 2750rpm and is capable, according to the factory, of returning a useful 5.8l/100km on the combined fuel economy cycle. Its relatively low compression ratio of 14:1, helps it meet stringent European diesel emission regulations at 150g/km CO₂, while providing superior environmental performance.

The engine incorporates an innovative shift schedule, INVECS-II Smart Logic which optimises gear selection in response to driving conditions. With a kerb weight of 1530kg, the 2.2L engine has an unbraked towing capacity of 1400kg.

Available in two specifications

levels, an entry level LS model and a premium or Sport variant, the ASX 4WD diesel automatic is loaded with all the safety and comfort features one would expect of a compact SUV.

The ASX already has a five-star NCAP safety rating and both diesel models come with seven airbags including front, side and passenger, curtain and driver knee devices. They also ABS brakes, active stability control, smartbrake and active hill start assist, a 6.1-inch touchscreen audio set-up, and an integrated reversing camera. They front-up with Bluetooth and USB connectivity and climate air conditioning.

The Sport version adds leather

trim, heated front seats, extra driving lamps, discharge headlamps, paddle gear shifting and 17-inch alloy rims instead of the LS car's smaller diameter items.

The ASX 4WD diesel automatic comes with Mitsubishi's All Wheel Control (AWC) which allows drivers to select 2WD for greater efficiency, 4WD if increased traction is needed and a 4WD Lock mode which provides more torque to the rear wheels for rough road driving.

The ASX can be locked in 4WD mode to speeds beyond 100kmh which you can't do with many front-drive derived 4x4 systems. It's designed for low traction on-road conditions and when you just give between the seats all-wheel-button a couple of prods and you get constant four wheel drive without waiting for sensors to detect traction loss, as you would in 4WD Auto. However, in the latter mode it will give you better fuel-consumption.

On the impact safety front, the ASX uses what Mitsubishi calls its Reinforced Impact Safety Evolution (RISE) body system. The RISE body system realises a rigid body structure while at the same time optimising weight savings. Connecting points between the A, B and C pillars and

roof are constructed in closed section with reinforcements arranged in a ring structure maximising structural strength. Collision-absorbing joints offer increased protection for the passengers within.

The five-seater ASX has a high driving position, above average rear legroom and a flexible cargo space which, thanks to a 60/40-split fold rear seat arrangement can be expanded from 416-litres with all seats up to 1150-litres when all seats are folded.

While the Sport model offers a commendable load of equipment, albeit without the power sunroof that Australian owners get with their equivalent Limited version, we think the base LS model is great value at \$3000 less, with only the useful paddle shifters missing from the "must-have" list.

With the ASX diesel starting at the LS's \$41,990 sticker, Mitsubishi has the cheapest Japanese diesel SUV on the market, and while it's lower spec than the Sport it's smaller-diameter wheels will actually provide better bumpy road ride quality.

We'd advise you to be quick about this feller. Mitsubishi simply isn't going to get enough of them to fulfil demand.



Familiar sight: But not with a turbodiesel automatic, folks.



Sport specification: It includes leather, paddle-shifters and a big information screen