

Suburban Observer & Eccentric Automotive Showcase

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CAR REPORT

Montero sport utility redefines luxury

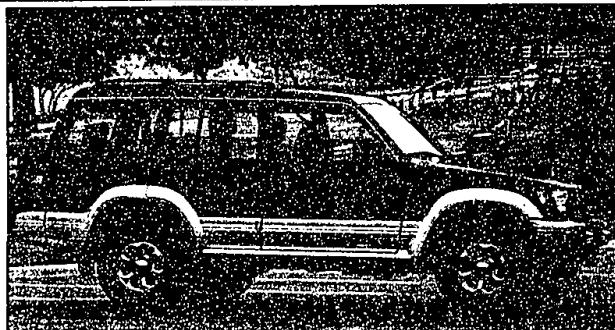
What's the difference between a minivan and a sport-utility vehicle?

The minivan has juice box holders.

If you're someone who refuses to buy a boring, functional minivan to haul your family around town, take a look at the sporty, rugged, fun-to-drive — and, yes, functional — 1995 Mitsubishi Montero.

The Montero sits high off the ground ... as a powerful sport utility should. Venture to say you could find yourself in 3 feet of mud and muck and probably still pull the Montero through it.

No mistaking this sport utility can do it, either; it's got Mitsubishi's own Active Trac 4WD system that allows shift on the fly at speeds of up to 62 miles per hour. That means you can shift from 2-wheel-drive to 4-wheel-drive (both high



ROAD TEST
By
Anne
Fracassa

and low) by little more than shifting a floor-mounted lever.

You could also use the all-wheel-drive mode (4H) all the time, on any road surface. There is a caveat in the owner's manual however, that continuous use of 4H may cause quicker wear and tear on the 4WD system as well as premature wear on the tires.

In the 2WD mode, the Montero's synchronized clutch lets the front differential freewheel, providing optimum fuel economy. That means keep it in 2WD and you'll get good mileage. And that's really what you want in a vehicle this big.

Estimated gas mileage is 18 mpg in the city and 25 on the highway. Not bad for what amounts to a large truck.

The Montero easily fits seven people seated in all positions. It accommodates four large adults (that means infant and toddler seats are a snap to use and in pitch another kid could fit between them) in the forward leather seats. The front seats are buckets, but the second set are bench seats with enough room, realistically, for three people.

In back of those are two basic seats — complete with belts for two other passengers. Those seats are easily removable, or can fold down, for increased cargo space, which is a more practical use.

The Montero is available in two trim levels: The basic LS and the luxurious SR, which was tested.

The Montero is outfitted with a new 3.0-liter single overhead cam 24-valve engine that provides 177 horsepower (168 horsepower in California). The SR is equipped with a powerful 3.5-liter double overhead cam V-6 engine introduced last year. That engine provides 214 horses.

A four-speed automatic transmission is standard on both models. There are three settings on the transmission that can fit a variety of driving moods — power, normal and hold. Power increases rpms during gear shifting, and hold is for low-traction surfaces like ice, mud and snow.

The SR model adds warm and cozy leather and wood trim package, adjustable shock absorbers and chrome wheels.

Whew! That's a lot of stuff on a 4WD, maybe more than you'll ever need. It all comes with a mighty price tag of \$34,825 base on the LS; the SR is \$38,171.

Yep, it's expensive. But the Montero has Lexus-like comfort, ruggedness of a minivan or pickup truck. If you can afford it, it's worth the money.

Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti NewsFeatures.

1995 Mitsubishi Montero GS

Class Sport utility

Engine 3.5-liter double

overhead cam V-6

Mileage 18 city / 25 hwy

Where built Japan

Base price \$38,171

If you'd like to see a particular model tested or if you have a car question, send Anna Fracassa a message at AVANTI 1054, Avanti's America Online mailbox. Or comment through the Internet at AVANTI1054@aol.com

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