Observer & Eccentric Suburban Observer & Utomotive



Montero Sport may rate as best new truck on the road in 1997

By Anne Fracassa Avanti NewsFeatures

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Riding along the twisting, turning road they still call The Apache Trail, you can see why scores of unsuspecting colonists were ambushed and killed by Native Americans

Native Americans.

If you would have traveled in a 1997 Mitsubishi Montero Sport back then, however, it would've been a whole different story. This all-new sport utility vehicle from Mitsubishi can take anything you can throw at it. This is a go anywhere, versa-tile and flexible vehicle that has the fine refinements of a grand

the nine reinements of a grant a touring car.

This Montero Sport is a departure for Mitsubishi, a company known for its higher-volume Eclipse, Mirage and Galant. The bigger and older Montero, the company's full-size sport utility vehicle, is expensive and has never been seen as a volume vehicle by leading to the special control of the second of the

anybody.

But the new Montero Sport is smaller than the Montero and is classified as a compact sport





ROAD TEST Βv Anne Fracassa

utility. It has the look, feel, ride and comfort of a large sport ute and even has many of the amenities of a large SUV.

Styling is very smart. From its aggressive front grille and stance to its distinctive rear taillamp treatment, the Montero Sport looks like it can't be tamed. But slip behind the wheel, and you'll feel totally dif-

The interior is very user friendly and not at all confus-ing. Everything's in plain view

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and easy to reach, You can tell this vehicle was designed for the U.S. consumer.

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"Research told us that sport utility buyers wanted the ability to go anywhere in their SUV, yet still expected impeccable on-road manners," said Michael Krebs, mannger of product strategy for Mitsubishi. "Our goal was to develop a practical vehicle to take the kids to and from school on the weekdays and a family project and vacation vehicle on days off."

Montero Sport does that, and research shows that although 90 percent of today's sport utility buyers want an SUV to be capable of off-roading, only a fraction of those buyers actually go off-road.

And why should they? Here you're spending upwards of \$30,000 — or even \$50,000 — for an SUV and you're going to scratch it up — or worse — by off-roading in it? Yeah, right.

Mitsubishi engineers called

respects, even though it costs

less.
You don't have any problems with room in the Montero Sport. Headroom, hiproom and legroom are quite adequate for the rotund or the tall. Even though there are assist grips for all passengers — even rear — you won't have any trouble getting in and out of the Montero Sport.

The Montero Sport, is avail.

Driving both, you'll see a bit of improvement in the V6's performance. If you're planning to do any hauling, plan on the V6 and outfit it with the trailer package. Towing capability on the 2.4-liter is 2,300 pounds, while the V6 can lug 5,000.

Both engines can be mated to a 5-speed manual or electronically controlled 4-speed auto-

cally controlled 4-speed automatic.

The first thing my 3-year-old asks when she gets in one of my test cars is: "Where are the cupholders?" There's no shortage on the Montero Sport. It has a whopping 12 cupholders strategically placed throughout the cabin.

The ES model's rear seat is a full folding bench. On the LS and XLS models, there is a 60/40 split folding rear seat. The base also folds forward, allowing the rear seats to fold flat. The front headrests can be removed and the front seats recline all the way back and can be used as a bed.

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be used as a bed.

There are storage areas all around, including the traditional glove box, a box in front of the automatic shifter, console storage under the center armest, two in the rear cargo area, two in the rear quarter panels, two in-floor storage areas and an accessory socket is on the right quarter panel as well.

Standard on all models is an overhead console unit complete with clock, map lamps, garage

overnead consour that compared with clock, map lamps, garage door opener, sunglass holder and a magnetic access card holder. If you opt for the sunroof, you'll still get an overhead console with clock, map lamps and sunroof controls.

on the safety side, dual airbags are standard, but ABS is an option. There are skid

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plates standard on all models The rear hatch is designed to

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plates standard on all models.
The rear hatch is designed to flip out and a tailgate comes down. You can also choose whether to have the outside store your tire or have it equipped with the spare under the cargo area. Both rear treatments are radically different. I liked it with the outside tire storage. It just looked moro SUV-like.

Mitsubishi has a winner-in the Montero Sport because-it offers sensible transportation for everyday driving and is a lot of fun if you really do go offeroading.

It may be the best new truck on the road this year, and with a base price of \$17,700, the Montero Sport should sell well:—especially where buyers are smart and sophisticated, as they are in Detroit's northern suburbs.

suburbs.

Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti NewsFeatures. Tell us about your favorite car on the road in our online reader poll by writing AVANTI1054@aol.com.

1997 Mitsubishi Montero Sport

1997 Misubism Montero Sport Vehicle class: Compact sport-utility vehicle. Engine: 2.4-liter SOHC 16 valve 4-cylinder. Mileage: 19 city / 22 highway. Where built: Japan.



