

Price-Performance - 2009 Mitsubishi Lancer GTS

Contributed by Jeff Zurschmeide
Tuesday, 31 March 2009
Last Updated Tuesday, 07 April 2009

I like Mitsubishi cars. I think that, along with Mazda, Mitsubishi is the natural choice of drivers who want an economically sensible car that offers a sports car experience. Call it the "Bang for the Buck" ratio.

Mitsubishi rolled out their newest version of the venerable Lancer nameplate just over 14 months ago in December of 2007. The company has been making an economy sedan under the Lancer name since the 70s, and it's a good brand. The last generation of Lancer gave birth to Mitsubishi's economy supercar, the Evo.

OK, enough of the background. What have we got here for 2009?

The Lancer still comes in three normally-aspirated front wheel drive flavors - ES, DS, and GTS. The basic ES and DS versions come with an aluminum 2.0-liter DOHC MIVEC 4-cylinder engine, and the GTS version comes with a stronger 2.4-liter version of the same engine. The basic ES and DS engine produces 152 horsepower at 6,000 RPM and 146 lb-ft of torque at 4,250 RPM, while the 2.4-liter GTS version makes 165 horsepower. Fuel mileage is a respectable 21/28 for the 2.4-liter.

The Lancer you want is the GTS. The basic ES starts in the \$14,000 range, and the DS offers a few trim upgrades. But for \$17,990, or \$18,240 with the fancy rear deck spoiler, you get more horsepower and a sport-tuned suspension including bigger sway bars and spring/shock damping rates. The GTS's brakes are the same as used on Mitsubishi's larger, heavier Outlander SUV, featuring 11.6-in. (294 mm) vented discs in front and 11.9-in. (302 mm) solid discs in rear. To make sure people know you bought up, the GTS features 10-spoke 18-in. alloy wheels, front and side air dams, fog lights, a rear spoiler and a chrome tailpipe tip. It looks good.

The driving experience of the Lancer GTS is excellent. I've driven the \$28,000 Lancer Ralliart, the \$32,000 and \$38,000 Lancer Evolution variants, and unless you really need or want AWD and a lot of engine power, the GTS offers a lot of bang for a lot less buck.

The Lancer GTS accelerates like a scalded dog - especially if you bought the CVT version. Mitsubishi engineers have told me that the 5-speed is technically faster, but that assumes that you can drive like a professional. For most folks, the CVT with paddle shifters will feel (and be) faster than shifting the car yourself.

Braking, cornering, and general driving are all excellent in the GTS. You can really feel the upgraded suspension if you test drive the basic Lancer back to back with the GTS. The chassis feels both light and rigid, and the engine is tuned very nicely to let you drive the GTS to its best effect.

For the driver and passengers, the Lancer GTS is comfortable and spacious inside. Our usual "extended family test drive" in the Lancer took 4 adults and a teenager out to dinner in comfort. The trunk is also generous. The basic AM/FM/CD stereo is just fine, as is the automatic climate control, Bluetooth hands-free phone system, and cruise control. Of course it comes standard with air conditioning as well.

The GTS has an optional Navigation and Technology Package, which combines a 30-gigabyte hard drive navigation system with digital music server function, the Mitsubishi Multi-Communication System and the FAST Key entry system. FAST Key is a radio-fob that stays in your pocket or purse and allows you to unlock your car by pulling the handle on either of the front doors or the trunk, and allows you to start the car and drive. That will push the cost of your Lancer up around \$20,000.

About the only weak point I can find in a week of driving the GTS is that it has several vibration rattles and buzzes in the passenger cabin. One seems to come from the trunk or rear seat area, and I fixed one by adjusting the shoulder height of the driver's seatbelt. It's the kind of thing the dealer will surely fix under warranty, and in fairness the roads here in the Pacific Northwest could make a Rolls Royce chatter like a soupcan full of pebbles.

The bottom line on the 2009 Mitsubishi Lancer GTS is that this it's about as good as any car going for under \$20,000. If you want to make the jump to turbo and AWD, Mitsubishi has one of those, but it's an extra \$10 to \$20 grand. My advice is, if you're test-driving Corolla, Civic, Cobalt, Focus, Sentra and Mazda3, you need to test-drive a Lancer before you make a buying decision. I think you'll be impressed with Mitsubishi.