

The Mitsubishi Outlander 4h has generous proportions.



This month, TOM CLARK tries to find a cure for the modern-day problem of range anxiety, with the Mitsubishi Outlander 4h.

I have owned cars for over 35 years now, and with a car replacement overdue, I have never found making a new car choice so difficult. With the demonisation of diesel, oil prices increasing and a lagging electric car charging policy for the new infrastructure required, what does one buy? It reminds me of the 80s war between Betamax and VHS, as improvements in technology and marketing gained pace, with ironically the inferior system winning in the end.

Last year I reviewed a Lexus hybrid, but today's car is the Outlander PHEV, which stands for plugin hybrid electric vehicle. The difference is that the PHEV allows you to charge its battery from the mains at home, or a recharging station enroute. One is then able to drive on pure electric energy only,

be it only up to 32 miles, and then have the reassurance that the petrol engine fires up to charge the battery and/or drive the wheels until its 45 litre fuel tank runs dry.

As the delivery driver kindly dried off the car on my driveway, having washed it at a service station down the road, I looked around the car as I always do for damage. The first thing that struck me was its size, this was no Prius, it is also able to tow up to 1500kg, which may be sufficient for most people. I then proceed to check out the interior, it certainly doesn't have the Germanic feel of quality, in fact the seat heating buttons could have been straight out of an 80s Shogun, but as the press pack suggested it was more European in design. There is plenty of storage in the door bins for bottles, and rear leg room is excellent, and without a transmission tunnel in the middle,

an almost flat rear floor. The rear luggage area space was just as impressive, with plenty of room for my spaniel and all of his accessories.

I had a varied week planned, ideal I thought for trying the claimed 156 mpg. My plans included local mileage and also a weekend trip to the Cotswolds which some pure EVs would struggle to do without stopping. The first problem I encountered where to plug it in. The garage was out, with my weekend sports car cocooned from the winter weather in there. With warnings not to use an extension cable, my only option was to dangle the 13amp cable out of a window to the car on the driveway. With a fluorescent jacket draped over the cable in order to avoid John the postman walking into it, I reached for the owner's manual. The battery was empty following a long delivery journey, so the



Charging with a 13 amp lead.



Displayed MPG can be misleading.



The cavernous boot allows plenty of room for dogs - and storage.

Phev... WE MADE IT!

info

The Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV - prices start at £34,305 OTR as tested.

The PHEV 4h starts from £36,995 OTR as tested.

Plus protection pack (£284.99 fitted price).

manual suggested it would take five hours to charge to full - time to put the kettle on!

The following morning the green light on the charger flashed away indicating the battery was fully charged, and with my dog's tail also indicating he was ready for his morning walk, I scooped up the keys and loaded him into the boot. The temperature was a chilly two degrees C, and the cold had affected the car's battery. I checked the range in the instrument cluster, it showed a total of 308 miles including only 20 miles from the battery, nowhere near its claimed 32.

I pressed the EV button, so our three mile journey to the walking field would be in pure electric mode. As I drove down our track in eery silence the high driving position enabled me to see over the hedge. The steering was light, but overall a good ride quality on our frost damaged roads, and thanks to the positioning of the batteries giving a low centre of gravity very little body roll in the corners. With the seat heating and AC on by the time we arrived at our destination the battery was down to only 15 miles. With three miles to return home, and then 12 miles

each way to the health club, my plan of driving all day in pure electric mode was dashed. As I watched the battery range reduce to zero, the petrol motor seamlessly started, propelling the car with a little more noise than before for the rest of the day.

After another night's charge, it was off to the Cotswolds for three nights - with no ability to charge at the hotel this was going to be an interesting test. The Outlander engulfed all of our luggage and dog paraphernalia with ease, and off we set for our 120 mile journey. It wasn't long before we were at walking pace on the M6, the petrol engine had switched off and we were back to using battery power only.

Once off the motorway, we were onto the beautiful Cotswold roads. The rolling countryside and its undulating tarmac unearthed the Outlander's weakness, when I put my foot down to go uphill the petrol engine would rev highly in a most obtrusive way, only then to cut out to silence as we coasted downhill. On the outskirts of Broadway a road sign gave notice

of a 10% gradient downhill, and advised the use of engine braking, I could now try the paddles on the steering wheel. Unlike my weekend car's PDK paddle gearbox, which uses the paddles to change gear, the Outlander would change the amount of regenerative braking. It practice it was like changing down a gear, the car would slow down and generate more electricity, pull the right hand paddle and the car would start to accelerate downhill again. As I followed a trail of cars with their brake lights flickering on and off, I would use the paddles to modulate the cars speed instead.

Over the course of the week I covered a varied 381 miles, I was intrigued to find out what my average fuel consumption was.....well, it was 38mpg. Normally, I award an overall score for the car I review, this month I feel I am unable to. If you can plug in every night and have a short commute and the occasional long journey it would be four, if however you are a long distance driver it would be two.

So at the end of the week I am no nearer making a choice for my new car, so suggestions to the editor please! (Ed's note - no Porsches please.) ■

photographs: Write Image for You Media