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Mitsubishi Outlander

Anybody who has to plough across construction sites or up rutted farm tracks regularly will be well aware of the value of four-wheel drive.

Not everybody, however, wants or needs something that will allow them to tackle really rugged terrain. What they are more likely to be interested in is an off-roader that's also a pleasure to drive on ordinary roads and that won't look like a refugee from a year-long sub-Saharan expedition when it's parked on the drive.

Mitsubishi's new Outlander Commercial achieves that happy compromise of being both capable in the rough and user-friendly around town and on rural routes and high-speed intercity runs. That's why we're happy to hand it our 4x4 Van of the Year accolade for 2007.

Power comes courtesy of a 138hp Volkswagen-sourced 2.0-litre diesel married to a six-speed manual gearbox.

In 4x2 mode drive goes to the front wheels, with four-wheel drive engaged electronically by twisting a knob just to the rear of the gearstick.

Turn it to 4WD and torque is routed

to the wheels with the most grip subject to a maximum 70/30 front/rear split. If things start to get rough then you twist it to Lock. That locks the centre diff and gives you a 50/50 front/rear split.

Disc brakes — ventilated at the front, solid at the back — are fitted to all four wheels. They're supported by ABS and Electronic Brakeforce Distribution plus Traction Control and an Active Stability package.

Capable of handling a 705kg payload, Outlander Commercial can haul a braked trailer grossing at 2,000kg. Access to the vehicle's 2.0m³ cargo bay is by means of an unglazed hinged door on each side plus a rear,



horizontally split two-piece hatch.

Vehicles of this size and type don't always provide sufficient space for all the oddments that van drivers like to carry around with them, but Outlander Commercial is quite generous.

Provision includes a bin in each door with a moulding to hold a soft drink can,

a bin between the seats with a 12v power point, a lockable glovebox and a cubbyhole at the bottom of the dashboard. Glance up and you'll find a drop-down holder above the wind-screen for your sunglasses.

Air-con forms

part of the heating/ventilation system and electric windows and exterior mirrors are included in the deal.

A massively enjoyable vehicle to drive, Outlander Commercial offers ample performance and delivers it smoothly. Its mid-range get-up-and-go proves invaluable when it comes to getting past tractors and mums and dads towing caravans on single-carriageway A-roads, and the VW diesel needs a good deal of reining in on fast dual carriageways. All this is to the accompaniment of an exemplary gearchange action.

Four-wheel drive commercials used to wobble about like frightened blanchmanges whenever you tried to push them hard through a bend. Not this one. It comes with precision, providing plenty of feedback through the steering.

Nor does Outlander Commercial jump about all over the place when it encounters a ridge or a small pothole. It absorbs the shocks without drawing breath and carries on regardless.

Off-road the van is fine on uneven farm tracks and will tackle some quite steep slopes. It's a handy package for everybody from the construction site foreman to the local vet. ♦

