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Mitsubishi L200

One are the days when pick-ups were hulking agricultural workhorses that rode badly and offered precious little in terms of performance or refinement.

Today they are for the most part stylish, well-equipped comfortable packages with far better road manners than their predecessors. Nor do they lack punch either around town or on the motorway.

Mitsubishi's latest L200 is an excellent example of the sort of vehicle we're talking about. That's why it's won our Pick-up of the Year award once again.

Up for grabs solely as a 4x4, the 1,000kg-or-thereabouts-payload L200 is on offer as either a two-door Single Cab, a Club Cab — a stretched version of the Single Cab with a pair of occasional rear seats — or as a four-door Double Cab.

Power is provided by a 2.5-litre diesel generating either 136hp or 165hp. You get the extra 29hp by specifying a power upgrade chip that has the additional benefit of bumping torque up to 302Nm at 2,000rpm.

Whichever option you pick you get a five-speed manual gearbox — an



automatic 'box is available on some models — plus selectable Easy Select dual-range four-wheel drive with a low-range set of gears on tap should they be needed.

Some variants are equipped with Super Select instead. It consists of a central viscous coupling that automatically adjusts the front/rear torque split and incorporates a traction control system.

A variety of specification levels are listed ranging from the basic 4Work to the range-topping Elegance in a line-up that also includes 4Life, Warrior and Animal trim.

Even if you opt for the entry-level L200, you won't feel short-changed. The package includes ABS, a limited slip rear diff, driver and passenger

airbags and an MP3-compatible radio/CD player.

Opt for the 4Life and you'll benefit from air-conditioning, electric windows and remote central locking.

Over the years Mitsubishi has proved remarkably adept at steadily building up the image of L200 — the Double Cab in particular — so that it appeals to buyers who might not have previously considered a 4x4 pick-up.

It's been aided by the, still pretty favourable, tax treatment enjoyed by employees who opt for one rather than for a company car. The ability of companies to reclaim the VAT — L200 is after all a commercial vehicle — has helped too.

As a result goodie-laden derivatives such as Warrior, Animal and Elegance have done well for the marque. More recently we've seen the debut of the Raging Bull special edition Double Cab.

So what's L200 like to drive? Out on the highway you'll be agreeably surprised by

the huge improvement in refinement compared with what was on offer from the old L200. The current offering is no slouch off-road either, fording streams and tackling muddy ascents and descents, and rutted, boulder-strewn tracks with ease.

No matter which model you pick you get a roomy, comfortable cab and service intervals are longer than they were with the old model. OK, L200 may not have the biggest load bed in its class, but if you can live with that restriction then it could be the pick-up for you given its other very definite plus-points. ♦

