

2-MOTORING

Colt — 'in a league of its own'

THE MITSUBISHI Colt is raising eyebrows and breaking new ground in the small hatchback market with its combination of styling, performance, safety and value for money.

Officially the 2003 Colt falls into the small hatchback category - in reality it is in something of a league of its own.

Mitsubishi has aimed to raise the bar with the launch of the Colt which has a high level of specifications and road handling while still rating highly for fuel efficiency and price.

The Colt was delivered on a platform jointly developed with Daimler Chrysler and it shows. The model will be introduced in Europe where its funky looks could make it a cult vehicle.

Designer Olivier Bourlay has given the Colt a flowing bodyline with a curved front grille designed around

Mitsubishi's three diamond logo.

The front headlights with their three pipes play a big part of the Colt's distinctive look. The whole image is one of stability and character.

The 1.5 litre engine produces 72 kW of power at 6000 rpm and 132 Nm of torque at 4250 rpm. There is some real power in this engine, it takes only 2000 rpm to cruise at 100 kph. Large hills do not faze it.

Despite that, it is not too thirsty, a careful driver should be able to average five litres per 100 km (50 mpg) on long trips and between seven and eight (about 45 mpg) around town. The Colt uses the advanced INVECS 111 continuously variable automatic transmission. A single computer integrates the operation of the engine and automatic transmission to deliver

smooth road performance and fuel efficiency.

The test drive vehicle, the Colt Sport, has the option of a sport setting for the transmission, which increases the performance while using slightly more fuel. It will appeal to the more adventurous driver.

On the road the Colt does not feel like a small car. It holds the road with a firm feel from that solid leather steering wheel which inspires confidence in the driver and corners extremely accurately, thanks to a new power assisted electric motor. The highway performance of the Colt is exceptional for a car of this class.

In town the Colt is right in its element. The seamless transmission provides quick acceleration for moving off at intersections or into gaps in the traffic.

With a turning cycle of only 4.7 metres the Colt is totally commuter friendly.

The Colt is well equipped with safety features including dual airbags, ABS brakes and electronic brake distribution. The highly rigid body has earned it a five star rating for in-house crash testing with the Japanese NCAP programme which includes full frontal, side and rear impacts.

The rounded dashboard and wrap around design of the dash and instrument panel give a fishbowl-like wide-angle view.

One of a number of unusual features is that the gear shift sits on the steering wheel rather than the floor. This removes the



need to reach down and creates a real "hands-on" sense for the driver.

Intelligent design has given the Colt a rich variety of seating arrangements. As well as the standard 50-50 split, the whole rear seat can be folded up and moved forward 150mm to create more storage space. The seat moves forward or back in three easy stages.

The Colt is child-friendly, the 50-50 split means there is room for a child seat on one side and a buggy on the other.

Air conditioning, power windows and an audio system with CD player are standard on the Sport which also has slightly bigger 15 inch wheels and front fog lights.

The Colt is absolutely loaded with convenience functions.

The remote key can be used to retract the side mirrors, a handy asset if you are a tight park. If you forget and start driving with the mirrors retracted,

they will deploy again once the vehicle reaches 30 kph.

Even if the doors are locked they can be unlocked by a single pull of an inside door handle. If the door is unlocked with the remote key, it will automatically lock again if the door is not opened in 30 seconds.

If the headlights are left on after the key is removed, they will automatically turn off when the door is opened or after three minutes, which is a useful feature. Sensors monitor the amount of light available and turn the headlights on and off as needed.

At \$21,600 for the base ES and \$22,900 for the Sport (both plus on-road costs), the Colt is very competitively priced.

The Colt name has been around since 1962 but the new model is really something different, a supermini with big car road manners.

Report by John Jones

