

XTH DAN!

FROM A STREET REBEL TO THE THINKING MAN'S TARMAC WEAPON, THE EVO HAS COME A LONG WAY. WE TEST THE NEWEST MITSUBISHI IN INDIA

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In the press brochure of the Lancer X, there are two pages dedicated to the developers of the car – Ryugo Nakao and Hideyuki Iwata. All is well and the two are smiling at the camera, standing on either side of their finest creation. Then you notice one thing – the smiles. Both of them are beaming as if they were told to. Heck, it looks like instead of a Canon or a Nikon, there was a guy pointing an AK-47 at them and wearing a placard that said 'SMILE'.

Nakao and Iwata are, in all probability, very serious people. Only very serious people can develop something as phenomenal as the Mitsubishi Lancer X. Just check out the

specs they have given their newest toy – a two-litre engine that develops 290 legal horses, 37.3 kgm of torque at 3500 rpm onwards, all-wheel drive, a twin-clutch gearbox that is more intelligent than most men, active centre differential, an electronic nanny who answers by the name of SAWC (Super All Wheel Control) and a lot of more abbreviations and the like.

Get inside, twist the starter motor and you realise that PlayStation is just a game. And more importantly, the Evo X is not a game – it is a serious weapon made by serious people who have been forced to smile at PR shoots.

Though called the X, this Evo is the

sixteenth in the line of rice-rocket variants that give goose bumps to everyone who sees one, let alone drives one. The theme is simple – they all look like sedans that quit school and took to substance abuse, only to grow spoilers and large auxiliary lamps. My favourite is the most outlandish one, the 1998 edition Evo V complete with dinner-plate driving lamps. I remember spending a considerable amount of time next to the Tommi Makinen edition Evo VI at the Tokyo Motor Show in 2000, too. Since then, the Evos started becoming


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WITH YOUR RIGHT LEG SUNK INTO THE CARPET, IT TRANSFORMS INTO A WILD THEME PARK RIDE



somewhat tame and politically correct till the X you see in these pics came and turned the dial from Mild Aggression to Full-On Gaping Grille Violence.

We did think of driving the Evo X on the track, but then decided to hunt for loose surfaces, since the real genes of this machine come from WRC. Today, the development of the Evo is centred around on-road performance with a brief to out-accelerate, out top-speed everything, from Nissan 300ZXs to BMW M3s. The East Coast Road connecting Chennai and Puducherry was relatively empty the Saturday morning we drove out, and we started discovering corners from various racing tracks on this public highway sooner rather than later. In short, there was no question of driving this car slow – road or track, the Evo wanted to prove a point or two!

Starting the car is keyless and instead of providing a thumb starter that would have been the right thing to do, the FQ300 fires up when you twist a plastic ear situated where a key would have fitted. Immediately, you know that this is not the garden variety

Lancer your maternal uncle drove in the Nineties. A beautiful concoction of noises made by everything from pulleys to belts and subdued crackles make up the rather crisp exhaust note of the Lancer. Considering it's powered by a 1998cc, turbocharged Mivec engine, it does sound like a perfectly engineered machine. No boy racer thrum or waste-gate pops here – it may answer to the name FQ, but this is a dignified sports car, aurally.

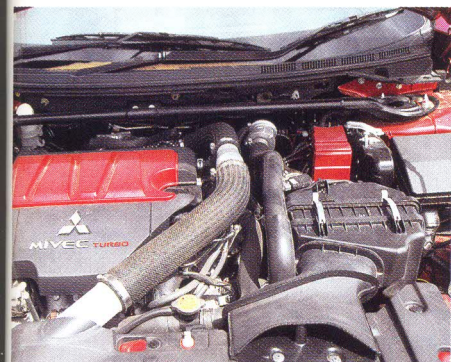
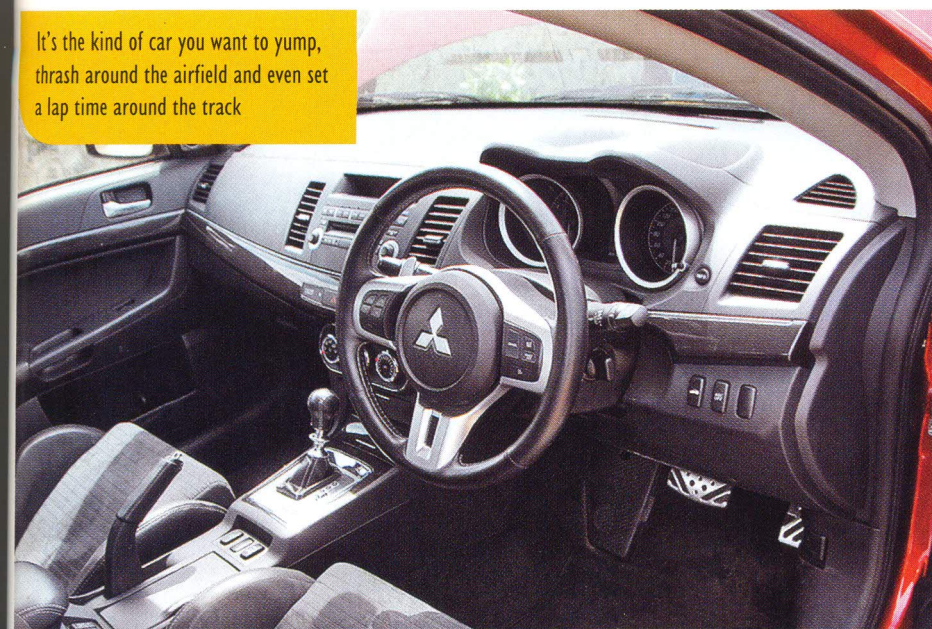
Mivec is the VTEC equivalent from Mitsubishi and given that the engine uses an aluminium block and a square cylinder format and full floating pistons, it's a perfect blend between being peaky and torquey. The test car featured the trick six-speed, twin-clutch automatic with Tiptronic-style gearshifts as well as paddles. It takes a while for the turbo to wake up and this seriously hampers the standing-start timing runs, with the Evo X. We got times in the range of 6.5 seconds to 100 kph, but we have to consider the fact that the car was a test hack that had seen a lot of clutch abuse. Once the boost is built up and with your right

leg sunk deep into the carpet, the FQ transforms into a wild theme park ride that is restricted only by your eagerness to live and ability to latch on to the steering wheel. Ah, the steering wheel! The Evo steering wheel is crisper than freshly printed dollar notes and as valuable when it comes to the overall dynamics of this supercar in four-door disguise. The front passenger seats are supplied by Recaro (accounting for ₹ 4 lakh in the process) and they are an absolute necessity in this automobile, unless you want to exchange the positions of your kidneys with something equally vital.

There are numerous settings to choose from – all-wheel drive 'surface' options that let you play around with torque transfer and Normal and Sport settings that are varied using fuel injection mapping. The car transforms the moment you select the Sports mode, and it is better done in the comfort of a closed stage or circuit. Such is the acceleration that slow-moving traffic filled the windscreen and precariously came close to contact as the gearbox

It's the kind of car you want to yump, thrash around the airfield and even set a lap time around the track

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downshifted its way in a pointless, calm manner. Then you panic and discover those brilliant brakes. Despite its eagerness to stay in the three-digit world as long as possible, the FQ300 is splendid to live with in city traffic too – where it still gets its share of eyeballs thanks to the rear spoiler that could substitute most park benches.

We were not confident of driving on the never-ending beach that lined the ECR – but we shouldn't have worried at all. With the traction setting meant for gravel, the Evo X wearing semi-slick (ahem, thanks to those who belted it around the tracks!) 245/40 R18 rubber tiptoed on sand to begin with and then danced around like a ballerina once given the go ahead.

Back on the ECR, the Evo was in no mood to relax – our passing speed tests were dismissed with ease and the four-pot started singing a high-strung song with turbo-wail for company. Suddenly it all started falling into place. A great piece of asphalt and a phenomenal car that is willing to go any lengths to please you. The speedo was hoisted to speeds that would have ensured

that the day's lunch would have been served at a friendly neighbourhood lock-up. Nothing, I repeat nothing, on the road could catch up or even run alongside the FQ300 that morning.

This is the kind of machine that expects devotion of the katana-making kind from drivers. More importantly, this is one of the finest examples of internal-combustion black art that results in 145.1 bhp per litre from a puny four-cylinder engine. And yes, you can use it for the school run too.

You can get similar performance and an even more prestigious brand for the same money (priced at ₹ 49.9 lakh) and that is where the challenge of the HM-Mitsubishi combine lies. It is one thing to launch a radical sports sedan in the country like the Evo, and it is another to find the right buyers with the right mindset to buy it. Perhaps the new generation Lancer will debut soon in India and the Evo will lure people into the showroom to buy something that looks like the real thing.

As long as the wing is intact, a hell of a lot of people will be interested in it too! **RTD**

AUTO DATA



LANCER EVO X

POWERTRAIN

DISPLACEMENT: 1998cc,
I-4, turbocharged
BORE x STROKE: 86.0 x 86.0 mm
COMPRESSION RATIO: 9.0:1
MAX POWER: 290 bhp@6500 rpm
MAX TORQUE: 37.3 kgm@3500 rpm
SPECIFIC OUTPUT: 145.1 bhp/litre
POWER TO WEIGHT: 180.7 bhp/tonne
TORQUE TO WEIGHT: 23.2 kgm/tonne
TRANSMISSION: 6-speed, twin clutch SST auto

STEERING

TYPE: Rack and pinion with power assist
TURNING RADIUS: 5.9 m

SUSPENSION

FRONT: McPherson struts, coil springs, anti roll bar
REAR: McPherson struts, coil springs, anti roll bar

TYRES

245/40R18, Dunlop tubeless

BRAKES

FRONT: Ventilated discs
REAR: Ventilated discs
ABS: Standard with EBD & ESP

DIMENSIONS

L/W/H (MM): 4505/1810/1480
WHEELBASE: 2650 mm
TRACK (F/R): 1545/1545 mm
GROUND CLEARANCE: 140 mm
KERB WEIGHT: 1605 kg
TANK CAPACITY: 55 litres

PERFORMANCE

0-60 KPH: 3.2 secs
0-100 KPH: 6.6 secs
80-120 KPH: 4.4 secs
100-140 KPH: 4.5 secs
TOP SPEED: 200 kph (achieved)

₹ 49.9 lakh,
EX-SHOWROOM, MUMBAI