

Road Running

With Mitsubishi

By Roger Witherspoon

The mid morning sun burned the mist from the highway, leaving a long, smooth ribbon of concrete winding through sun-splashed Kentucky mountains and shaded valleys. There was little company except for a lazily circling hawk and the only sound was the low rumble from the twin chrome turbos protruding from the rear of the Lancer Evolution.

The rumble increased to a low roar as I pushed the accelerator towards the floor, tapping the chrome paddle shift up to sixth gear as the speedometer nudged past 130 miles per hour as the hills flew by. A curve approached, and I tapped the paddle shift down to fifth gear while dropping the speed to 105. The huger spoiler over the trunk, which neatly dissects the rear windshield, worked with the traction control to prevent any sway as the Mitsubishi Racer rounded the slow curve with a mountain on the inside and a valley on the right. The world flew by in a green blur as the 18-inch wheels gripped the road tighter than a newly drafted NBA player grips his signing bonus check. I came smoothly out of the curve, tapped the paddle shift back up to 6th gear and zipped backup to 130. That was still below the Lancer Evolution's top speed of 155, but it was fast enough for this run.

The Lancer Evolution MR is a \$42,000 four-door sedan camouflaged as a street racer. It has a head turning design, from the aggressive front with the open mouthed grill to huge spoiler in the rear. It is the type of styling which some people just can't resist touching. And if that doesn't grab one's attention, the sound of rumbling from the twin exhausts whenever the keyless ignition is turned on usually grabs the attention of anyone nearby.

Under the hood is a four cylinder engine with twin-scroll turbochargers capable of cranking out 291 horsepower and 300 pound-feet of torque – a lot for a relatively small car. It can zip from 0 to 60 miles per hour in 5.2 seconds, which makes it quicker and faster than many or the more expensive roadsters it passes on the highway.

The driving experience is what you would expect from a high speed performance car. Both the leather-wrapped racing stick and the paddle shift are instantly responsive

Inside is a mixed bag. There is probably everything that the youngster looking for a hot rod would want but it may not be a comfortable ride for the older men who can actually afford it. The seats, for example, were designed for guys who are young enough to still wear long, slim fit jeans and who are at least six feet tall. They are small, hard and rigid, which ensures that the driver stays put during a high speed turn, but that is not the most comfortable on long, cross country treks. The seats, which have cloth bottoms and leather backs, are manually operated and can be adjusted forward and back, but not up and down to fit different heights. They can not be heated, which is surprising for a car in this price range.

In addition, the seat backs go nearly to the ceiling. As a result, it is nearly impossible to see over or around the passenger seat, obliterating any sight lines and making it difficult to see traffic on the side of the car. And for styling and functional reasons, the rear spoiler is an inch thick, and blots out the road – and any cars – more

than about 50 feet behind the Lancer Evolution. As a result, you have to rely almost exclusively on the rear view mirrors for navigating through high speed traffic, and that can be scary when backing up in a crowded parking lot with oblivious children scampering by.

There is a lot inside, particularly in the electronics, for those who are looking for a sporty ride. It comes with Bluetooth cell phone connectivity, which is easy to use and effective. The navigation system has a touch screen and is intuitive to operate – you don't need to memorize a manual to work it. The map on the navigation screen, for example, changes scale automatically – shifting from as little as every 350 feet when cruising through residential streets, to a quarter of a mile scale when racing down the highway. The automatic adjustment is speed sensitive – at 80 mph it jumped from an eighth to a quarter of a mile automatically, with a quick notice of the change. It is a smart system equally adept at keeping you from getting lost on strange highways or strange rural roads.

The entertainment system comes with Am/FM and Sirius satellite radio, though it comes with just a single disc CD player which is behind the navigation screen. They make up for that seeming lack, however, with a 30 GB hard drive which can memorize CDs and allows you to create your own music box, turning the Lancer Evolution into a high speed iPod.

The sound reverberates through a 650-watt Rockford-Fosgate system with nine speakers and a 10-inch sub woofer which makes the sides of the car reverberate with the cranked up bass line. It is as adept at delivering every note in either a fast-paced, Kentucky bluegrass number by Mountain Heart, or the meticulous jazz of Keiko Matsui. It also has an audio/visual connection which allows you to play video games using an in-dash joy stick, or play a movie when the car is in park. The Evolution comes with fingertip controls for the cruise command, audio system, and phone on the leather-wrapped steering wheel.

The Lancer Evolution –MR is not for everybody. But if you are looking for hot rod on a modest budget, and your preference is thrills instead of creature comfort, than road running in the Mitsubishi Racer is a fast, good-looking way to travel.

2008 Lancer Evolution - Mitsubishi Racer

MSRP:		\$42,054
EPA Mileage:	17 MPG City	22 MPG Highway
As Tested Mileage:	9.3 MPG City	17.7 MPG Highway

Performance / Safety:

0 – 60 MPH	5.2 Seconds
Top Speed	155 MPH

2.0-Liter DOHC I-4 aluminum engine producing 291 horsepower and 300 pound-feet of torque; twin-scroll turbocharger; twin-clutch, sportronic, 6-speed, manual shift transmission; paddle shift; all wheel control; Brembo ventilated disc brakes; front strut tower bar; active yaw control; rear limited slip differential; front & rear stabilizer bars;

fog lights; high density headlights; dual front air bags; front seat mounted side air bags; side curtain airbags; driver's side knee airbag; 18-inch wheels.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/FM Sirius satellite radio; 650-watt Rockford-Fosgate premium sound system with 9 speakers and sub woofer; 30-GB hard drive music server with MP3 & USB connection; Single CD, DVD player; navigation system; Bluetooth cell phone connection; leather wrapped steering wheel and shift knob; leather seats.