

MIDDLEWEIGHT USED 4x4

MITSUBISHI SHOGUN SPORT



A cheeky bit of marketing sets this really very ordinary four-wheel drive estate among the capable, high-image and technically advanced Shoguns, and at a price to match its perceived position. Mitsubishi's official importers decided to include the Challenger in its official line-up when it became clear that personal imports of this cheaper, more basic Mitsubishi direct from Japan were cramping the sales of official Shoguns.

The Challenger is simply a more old-fashioned design, with a simpler four-wheel drive system – neither of which is a bad thing if the price is right. The Challenger – or Shogun Sport in more recent guise – has racy enough exterior styling with its roof rails and lower body cladding, but the interior is bland in typically Japanese fashion.

It's comfortable enough as a family five-seater with useful luggage space, but it struggles to perform with the 98-horse 2.5-litre turbodiesel so ultimately the livelier 3.0-litre petrol V6 version is more desirable. Road behaviour is average, refinement not in the true Shogun class, but the Sport provides reliable if uninspiring long-term transport.

Low ride height and independent front suspension limit the Sport's off-roading ability, though the selectable four-wheel drive system includes low range and the front hubs lock automatically so it copes readily enough with rough trails and slippery surfaces as long as the mud doesn't get too deep.

Note that many privately-imported cars are crowding used 4x4 forecourts, and that these could be years older than official imports. Buy one of these only if you're satisfied that the car is legal, has a new MoT certificate and you can get insurance cover.

MITSUBISHI SHOGUN



Old Shoguns abound on forecourts, but do be aware that Pajeros, although basically the same vehicle, have been privately imported and might not be as easy to MoT and insure as officially imported examples. With such a huge range of cars to choose from, all with varying specifications, you'll be getting very much what you pay for so do shop around for the right car for you at the right price.

Shoguns have always been leading-edge vehicles in mechanical terms, the styling a little on the brash side, particularly in the latest generation. The advantage of buying nearly-new, however, is that the current range of engines is superbly refined and efficient, the turbodiesel in particular is excellent.

Expect no bargains, though a 3.2 DI-D five-door on a 2000 X-plate could be yours for £18,000, though if you're in this area of the market pay the extra £2000 for a clean GLS to get the automatic air conditioning, cruise control and height adjustable drivers' seat. Note that long-wheelbase versions are seven-seaters, even though the rearmost seats may not be immediately visible – they fold away neatly into the boot floor.

The Shogun uses the complex Super Select four-wheel drive system which allows four-wheel drive to be selected on the move, and to be left engaged for additional security on slippery roads. Low range and locking rear differential are excellent traction aids, but the limited wheel articulation allowed by the taut front suspension and the long overhangs limit the car's agility in tortuous conditions.

On the road the Mitsubishi Shogun is relatively ponderous and suffers from some body roll, but is thoroughly stable when driven quickly.

NISSAN PATROL GR



For big presence on the road and off it this is the car for you. The Patrol, even in its latest form, is a bit of a truck, but a gorgeous one with fine performance and huge inside space.

The main reason for the Patrol's relative lack of refinement is that it's still a genuine off-roader at heart, one of the few mainstream 4x4s that shuns any form of independent suspension, with the result that it exhibits massive wheel articulation which, with the proper selectable four-wheel drive system, standard locking rear differential and electrically-dismountable rear stabiliser bar, give it almost unbeatable off-road agility.

Few of the latest-model 3.0-litre turbodiesels will have found their way on to the used forecourts, but they're the most desirable particularly if you can find an SE+ which mixes rugged good looks with the luxury of leather upholstery, automatic air-con, CD changer and heated front seats, as well as including side airbags in the specification. Pay £20,000 for a 2000 X-plate, up to £24,000 for a year-old 51-plate.

Before the 3.0-litre turbodiesel appeared the new-look Patrol was powered by a rather breathless 2.8-litre TD, lacking low-down torque but impressively refined and providing adequate highway cruising ability. But if you are considering hard off-roading or need a gutsy towing vehicle, look for one of the previous models with the 4.2-litre diesel engine. They were only available until '95, but a well-specified range-topping SGX shouldn't cost more than £6000 in tip-top condition. If you want big power and don't mind the extra fuel cost, the 4.2-litre petrol model continued until the arrival of the new model in '98, and one on an R-plate could be yours for £7000.

RATING

PRICE RANGE £9000-£19,000

ON-ROAD ●●●●●

OFF-ROAD ●●●●●

PRACTICALITY ●●●●●

AVAILABILITY ●●●●●

VALUE FOR MONEY ●●●●●

RATING

PRICE RANGE £2000-£28,000

ON-ROAD ●●●●●

OFF-ROAD ●●●●●

PRACTICALITY ●●●●●

AVAILABILITY ●●●●●

VALUE FOR MONEY ●●●●●

RATING

PRICE RANGE £9000-£24,000

ON-ROAD ●●●●●

OFF-ROAD ●●●●●

PRACTICALITY ●●●●●

AVAILABILITY ●●●●●

VALUE FOR MONEY ●●●●●