

Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV's Two-Season Test Drive

The ice storm of April 2018 was yet another epic storm-of-the-century type of weather event that is now occurring too often. I had booked a plug-in hybrid four-wheel-drive (4WD) vehicle for a week but it was not available as its windshield had been broken during the storm. I was coming up to a deadline, so another one was provided a few days later. There were still lots of ice pellets on the ground to try out the Outlander PHEV, a plug-in hybrid electric vehicle with 4WD. When I took it back, most of the white stuff was gone, so within five days I got to test drive in both winter and spring conditions!

Escarpment Conditions

This vehicle has a user selectable "EV Priority" mode that I wanted to try out under Escarpment conditions. There are several different modes that the driver can select, ranging from primarily electric "EV Priority" to "Battery Charge" which uses the gasoline engine to charge the battery. My test run was about 30 km with an elevation difference of about 100 m. The roads were a mix of urban, highway and rural, up and down the Escarpment. The literature publishes the range for battery use alone as 35 km, and I wanted to see if the vehicle could do it without switching to the gasoline motor. It did fairly well, accelerating into traffic and going up hills, without gasoline engine help. This pushed the test distance and elevation to the limit, but it stayed electric. Notable too, was that it could switch to 4WD while staying in electric only, which, according to Mitsubishi, no other Canadian plug-in hybrid SUV offers.

Charging Details

I tried out a municipal charging station at the local arena. It was a level 2 charger with the literature stating a 3.5-hour charge timeframe. To unlock the charging cord and turn it on, you need to swipe your credit card, or use another proprietary card. The charger was close to my gym, so I plugged it in and walked over for exercise. At home overnight, I tried the supplied charging cable and plugged it into a regular 120V receptacle at my house. The cable is a level 1 and the literature states a charge time of eight hours for the 12-amp setting. I tried to test a fast charger at a different municipal building. It was a level 3, and the literature reported an 80 per cent charge in 25 minutes. I could not use the charger with my credit card. Presumably, I needed a proprietary card. This inconvenience was annoying. I found the time to fiddle around with the charging plug not too onerous, so it would not likely be irritating in a routine situation.

The literature states that you can set the charging time, both onboard and/or through a cell phone app, to take advantage of lower grid electricity rates. I tried another feature, which started a heater in the vehicle at a pre-set time, using the onboard timer. There are air-conditioning and defroster options, too. If you use the grid's electricity, presumably, you can heat/cool/defrost before jumping in, without using the vehicle's on-board power!

I tried the hands-free option for making cell phone calls and found it worked fairly well. I could communicate and dial a number hands-free, even with wind noise from driving with the window down. There are a few other options for cell phones, a remote and to

link apps with the vehicle. My old flip phone was too IQ-challenged to be "Smart" enough to try either of these features. There is a basic GPS that only gives numerical positions, but no map integrated into the vehicle. Presumably there is an app related to a linked cell phone that could provide this feature. This is the first year for having the Outlander PHEV in North America but the literature says this vehicle is the top-selling plug-in hybrid in the world! I understand that the model has not been updated for a while, so presumably, if minor changes for the North American market have been made, a lot of the bugs that you might find in a new version have already been worked out.

Towing

Notable, too, is a towing hitch that can be installed as an option. It seems rare that electric/hybrid vehicle manufacturers permit towing. The maximum trailer capacity is 680 kgs. The optional trailer hitch and wire harness is \$841.90 which does not include labour to install.

Fun Points

- Ease of unplugging, unlocking, and driving with the key in my pocket.

- The adaptive cruise control worked very well in 401 stop-and-go traffic, but was alarming in a roundabout. (Note to self: Disengage when in a roundabout!)

Annoying Points

- Too many options with too many buttons, even for a techy type like me, although if you just drive, it seems seamless.
- Confusing public charging stations.
- Different measurement units in the literature between metric and imperial; you need to pay attention when reviewing them.

Price and Dealers

The Outlander PHEV comes in three trim levels, MSRP of \$42,998 to \$49,998. I tested the GT S-AWC trim line, the most premium of the three levels, with a MSRP of \$49,998. Delivery, PDI, taxes extra, less rebates. There are currently two Mitsubishi dealers in the Niagara Escarpment area, Owen Sound and Hamilton. There are several in the GTA, and relatively near the Escarpment.

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The 2018 Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV was tested up and down the Escarpment.

PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.