

Mitsubishi I

JOHN DAVIS: Mitsubishi is no stranger to electric cars. They've been selling their tiny i-Miev EV in Japan and Europe since 2009. We even tried a pretty bare bones right hand drive model about a year ago. Well, now the US-spec Mitsubishi I model has arrived. It's bigger, much better equipped, and is the least expensive highway-going EV you can buy. So, let's see if the "i" has it all.

Well, one thing that the 2012 Mitsubishi i certainly has is a unique appearance. Sort of hard-boiled egg meets the Jetsons. Though the enlarger U.S.-spec i 5-door does have more presence. Whether you like it or loath it will pretty much depend on which side of the "Hey look at me and what I'm doing for the environment" fence you fall on.

The i's 10 inches of added length, and 4 inches of increased width is accompanied by new front and rear bumpers re-designed to pass U.S. safety regs. With the huge windshield small vertical hood, and thin bubble headlights, the front end is indeed futuristic looking. Standard 15-inch wheels are pushed to the corners, with exaggerated fenders surrounding them. Our test car's attention grabbing graphics aren't included although some owners might want them! And the charging port is located on the right rear fender.

The i's 16kWh lithium-ion battery pack is located low in the car's chassis, helping keep the center of gravity near to the ground and interior room maximized. The rear mounted, rear-wheel drive 49kW electric motor is rated at 66-horsepower and 145 pound feet of torque. So, we weren't expecting lightning fast acceleration and an uninstrumented 13.5 seconds to 60 miles per hour certainly isn't.

In government testing the i achieved a real world driving range of 62 miles, which is less than the Nissan Leaf or Ford Focus Electric; our i indicated 73 miles when fully charged. A full charge takes 7 hours with 240 volts, up to 22 hours using 120, with a cost of about \$3.

Inside the new i's wider cabin we quickly notice more space between the seats, with a re-designed console set between, and a normal looking shifter. The seats are cloth and a little utilitarian in feel, but comfortable enough to ride out the full EV range. Driver's seat heat is standard. Gauges are EV-specific and include a power meter, as well as an info center with large distance to empty readout. Rear seats are hard, but with more length there's plenty of room for 2, and seat backs fold 50/50, to expand the 13.2 cubic-feet of trunk space to a very useful 50.4.

A key fob remote allows you to monitor the state of the charge, and pre-heat or cool the cabin. Now, other EV's offer similar features but require an app for a smart phone.

In typical EV fashion, driving the i takes a little getting used to, but we found the power adequate, and the ride smooth. Steering is very low effort, making low speed maneuvers a dream. The usual instant EV torque seems a little muted

compared to other recent EV's we've driven, but the i has no problems getting in to the flow of highway traffic. Top speed is 80.

he additional size has gone a long way towards making the i feel more like a real car. It drives more substantial and less like an EV commuting device. Government Fuel Economy Miles Per Gallon Equivalency Ratings are 126-City, 99-Highway, and 112-Combined. That's better than either the Leaf or Focus Electric. The i's base price also bests them at \$29,975. Government tax credits can reduce that by up to a third or better; our well equipped SE begins at \$31,975.

As more EVs emerge and competition grows, they will continue to gain efficiency with shorter charging times. And, like the 2012 Mitsubishi i, become cheaper to buy and attainable by more consumers. The i may not quite have it all, but it does have the lowest price and best MPGe rating of any 4 or 5 passenger pure electric going. And that's certainly enough to make the i a serious EV player.