

# MPV that thinks it's a 4x4

**It's big, it's practical, it seats seven, it goes off-road. It also looks mean and costs from just £6000. Is the Mitsubishi Delica the best-value family package on the road?**

STORY & PHOTOGRAPHS NICK GIBBS

Many Delicas have already found their way to the UK but they're still rarer than Estimas and Pajeros. That's about to change, though, because of their clever seats and funky looks

**IS THE MITSUBISHI DELICA** an MPV with 4x4 ability, or a 4x4 with MPV style? Either way, it's a people mover to inspire awe on the school run. And at just £6000 for something like the one shown here, it has to be the best way yet to combine a practical seven-seat interior with real 4x4 attitude and plenty of off-road ability, too.

The Delica must be the ultimate lifestyle vehicle. You can sleep in it, drive off-road with friends and family, or turn it into a cavernous van. But more important, it lets you drive an impressively sensible MPV – minus the dull family image.

No surprise, then, that the the Shogun/Pajero-based Mitsubishi Delica has been tipped by Japanese importers as the next big thing to appeal to an increasingly import-savvy public. Low mileage, cheap prices, automatic diesels and fantastic spec are typical of secondhand cars from Japan, and the Delica has all this in spades.

#### **Just what is a Delica?**

The current model was born in 1994 and is still sold in Japan. The version it replaced also crops up for sale here, but that was based on the L300 van and looks it. That had a 2.5-litre diesel engine which was ditched in the later version for Mitsubishi's punchy 138bhp 2.8-litre turbodiesel, also used in the Shogun/Pajero.



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# What MPV and 4x4?



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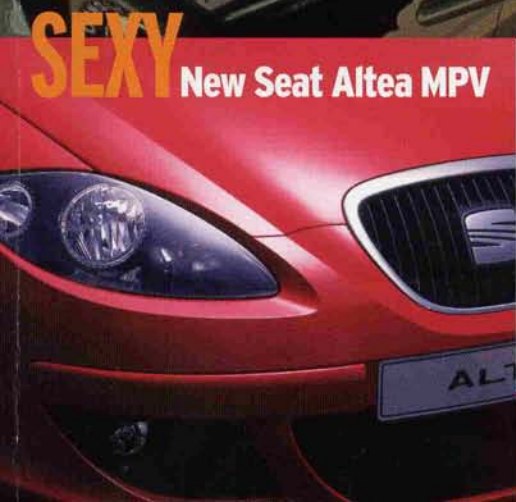
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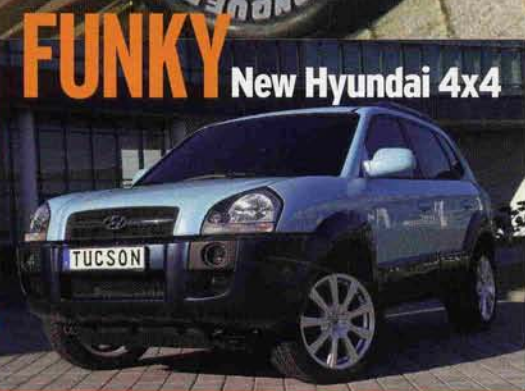
# YEAR'S BEST BUY

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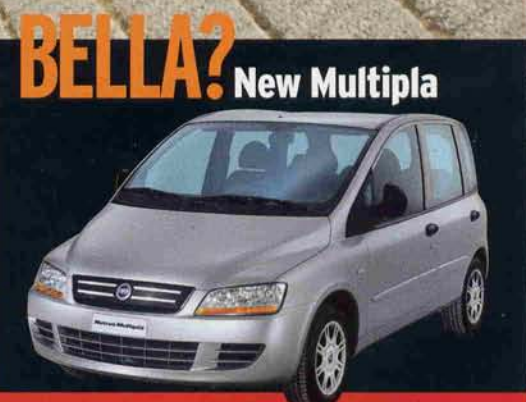
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Me and my Delica

# 'It's been perfect'

**Peter Millis, a researcher from Brighton, bought a Delica seven months ago... and likes it so much he's just bought another**

We had just bought a Volvo S40 when my wife became pregnant with our fourth child. When Riley was born it was obvious that a five-seater car would be hopeless for a family of six so we soon started looking for something bigger. We were after a vehicle that we could afford (well under £8000), in really good

condition, with a bombproof engine, low mileage and lots of seats.

Initially we were after a Mitsubishi Pajero but found the rear seats too cramped and nothing stood out as being in good condition on the ones we saw. Toyota's Lucida/Estima/Previa had loads of room but there are just so many

on the road. I then came across the Delica.

I called someone who was advertising one in Autotrader for £6000 but he'd sold it the morning I called. However, he gave me the name of a friend in Edenbridge who had just imported a couple. He had a lovely 1994 Delica Space Gear Exceed 2.8 4x4 8-seater with 80,000km (50,000 miles) on the clock that he'd only picked up that morning from the docks - £6000 with new MoT, six months' tax and a full valet.

It's been perfect for

us. There's nothing else that comes anywhere near it for comfort, looks and enjoyment to drive. And nothing else touches it for value for money and equipment levels. Despite having a massive moon buggy appearance, the Delica is in fact no wider or longer than most family cars. But it's the height that really makes it stand out from the crowd (choose multi-storey car parks carefully as the lowest Delicas are 6.5ft tall!). We took a five-day holiday in Wales and had a wonderful view over all the hedgerows

which would have been non-existent even in a Renault Espace. There's so much legroom between all the seats that stowing all our luggage was a piece of cake.

I've caught the bug and have imported another one myself after finding some good people to deal with in Japan. This has been an interesting experience and something I am going to do again. The Pajero Owners' Club ([www.pocuk.com](http://www.pocuk.com)) has been an invaluable source of knowledge and help.



Our car's chunky looks were boosted by off-road tyres which were noisy on the tarmac. Bull bars, bonnet bulge and raised ride height give Delica an aggressive look for an MPV, but it's a civilised drive

and it wouldn't just be quieter for cruising but may also improve on the claimed 23mpg, too.

When straight, smooth tarmac gives way to cracked, curved B-roads, the Delica isn't as happy. Every bump is transmitted in 4x4 style, while bends bring on plenty of roll. You can travel in two-wheel-drive mode, but we kept it in high-range 4x4 to avoid sliding out of corners in the damp. Of course, if road gave way to mud and rock, you'd engage low-range and expect the Delica to perform very well, given its Shogun underpinnings.

The all-round disc brakes stop you smartly, while manoeuvring is a doddle, especially with that reversing mirror.

### The import effect

Japanese imports are usually low mileage, and this 95M Delica at 70,000 miles was about as high as they go. Cars first sold in Japan are also well treated; if you see one that looks scrappy check that it wasn't the importer making a hash of UK-legal alterations. For example, the speedo should be overlaid with an mph dial and the Japanese mini-disc stereo swapped for an aftermarket CD player; in the Delica this creates a gap in the dash that needs to be professionally filled.

Lots of equipment is a given, and although you should check every gadget, it would be a huge surprise if something didn't work. Electric windows, mirrors and sunroof are a certainty in a Delica, while air con will always be present.

As with most Japanese grey imports, service history is the only missing piece in this jigsaw. Car Care offers a free, two-year warranty and service to calm your worries, but you've also got Japanese engineering on your side. Mitsubishi dealers in the UK have all the Delica manuals and know what to do - it's not a complicated car. But as this test showed, it is an interesting one, with loads going for it. The next big thing? For sure.

● With thanks to Car Care, Wraysbury, 01784 482454

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Second row of seats slides to provide more room for those in the back; dash should have retro-fitted mph dial; curtains and skylights are standard fit



**ESSENTIALS**

**Mitsubishi Delica Exceed**

Engine: 2.8-litre, 4cyl diesel

Power: 138bhp

Top speed: 100mph (est)

0-60mph: 14sec (est)

Fuel consumption: 23mpg

Insurance group: 11

This car: 1995/ 71,000 miles

On sale at: Car Care, Wraysbury, Middlesex O1784 482454

www.ourcar.co.uk/  
STATIONGARAGE.htm

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VIEWING

9.00AM

SALE START

11.00AM



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The Japanese fondness for bizarre names means you may see it as the Delica Space Gear Super Exceed. As Pajero owners know, Exceed is Mitsubishi's name for top spec, like Ford uses Ghia. It is the Exceed versions you'll see most of. Some are two-wheel-drive, MPV-only versions and should be priced down accordingly. The interesting ones are four-wheel drive, and that's what we have here.

You can expect to pay £5500-£6000 for a high-mileage 1994 car and up to £11,000 for a '97-98 model. Most are auto and all are very well specced.

**Flexible interior**

Unlike 4x4s with more than five seats, the Delica has cutting-edge MPV flexibility. And not just compared with other MPVs born around 1994; the seat tricks shown by its seven-seat interior shame even brand new designs.

In the seven-seat version (there's an eight-seater too), the two captain's chairs in the second row slide forward on rails to give more legroom to those in back. If you need more room, the squabs flip up to allow them to slide right up against the front seats. Or you can swivel them to face the rear seats. It's all just like the new (£25,000) VW Caravelle.

Meanwhile, the rear bench flops down to make a

bed, or splits in two to hinge up and clear the boot altogether. Seats up, there's a Galaxy-sized area for luggage in the back; ie not fantastic but useable.

Once they've flipped, slid and swivelled, your passengers are made to feel like limo passengers. Most Delicas come with electric curtains, plus four individual 'Crystal Roof' electric sunshades which open to reveal four skylights. Some, including the one we drove, supplied by Car Care in Wraysbury near Slough, come with rear air con and heater.

**Real performance**

With its bonnet scoop, (removable) bull bar and mesh grille, the Delica out-menaces all MPVs on the road and gives an impression of brutish power. The torquey 2.8-litre engine backs up this impression, but it exhibits the same lack of subtlety. On start-up a vast, echoing rumble reaches a crescendo if you force the four-speed auto to hold on to its low gears. But despite having to shift the Delica's 2030kg heft, the diesel's sound and fury actually signifies real performance.

Once at motorway speeds, the engine noise drops to a low thrum and in our version we were left with the personal thunderstorm supplied by the meaty off-road Bridgestone tyres. Replace those

**DID YOU KNOW?**

● Secondhand cars in Japan are subject to a rigorous MoT called the Shaken. It's due when the vehicle is three years old and then every two years. But instead of trying to get their old cars through it, many owners just trade in for something new. That means there's a glut of used, right-hand-drive cars that dealers can't shift; the Japanese are hooked on buying new. Even when exported and converted as per the British single vehicle approval test (SVA), they're still cheap enough to sell competitively which is why they make such great buyers over here.