



Mitsubishi Motors new L200 Pick-up – still a legend in its own lifetime

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Road test by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency)

A legend in its own lifetime is Mitsubishi's L200 pick-up sold globally over six decades accounting for over four million sales. Now the fifth generation versions are with us.



The first generation was launched in 1978 as a single cab body style with standard and long wheelbase body options, with two wheel drive, and 4×4 traction for SWB models was introduced in 1982.

Series 2 came along in 1987 with petrol and diesel engines with 2WD and 4WD traction. Series 3 was introduced from 1996 and that was the big change when double cab versions became available. The L200 opened up the double cab pick-up market in the UK both for work and leisure use, due in part to its passenger and load carrying capabilities. It was also the industry's best seller because of the very favourable low company car tax rates. In addition, businesses were able to reclaim the VAT element of the purchase price.

At the height of the UK boom in double cab sales, 12,000 Mitsubishi L200's were sold in 2003.

Series 4, launched in 2006, grew the L200's reputation and the overall pick-up market, and it has outsold all other pick-ups and won the most awards from the motoring media.

The all-new Series 5, launched late in 2015 has continued the L200's growth and already has won several Pick-Up of the Year awards from both the passenger car and commercial vehicle motoring publications. The L200's main competitors continue to be the Ford Ranger, Nissan Navara, VW Amarok, Toyota Hilux and Isuzu D-Max.

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In 2015 the UK's Pick-Up market sector, mainly double cabs, recorded 40,558 registrations, a 20% increase over 2014. Mitsubishi sold 8,425 L200s, nearly 40% up on 2014.

Although the Mitsubishi L200 Series 5, 2.4-litre 178bhp is now with us, lower priced Series 4, 2.5-litre 136 hp turbodiesel 4WD models continue to be available in two door Club Cab 4Life and Single Cab 4Life forms at prices from £15,845 (£19,014 inc Vat).

Series 5 models with their all-new aluminium 2.4 litre, 178 hp turbodiesel engine are all



double cab 4WD models with 4Life, Titan, Warrior and Barbarian equipment levels, with prices starting at £19,749 (£23,698 inc. VAT) and rising to £25,199 (£30,238 inc. VAT) for the Barbarian Automatic version.

Tough at the top...

Now the fifth generation L200 range is with us and it is totally new from nose to tail. It is all about letters; 'L' being the prefix for the model and it retains its unique 'J' curve body design between the cabin and the load area. This is not just for visual styling because it allows for a 25 degree recline for the three rear seats for the Double Cab. We can now add 'R' into the letter mix as that is for Refinement. The new models are a huge improvement in all areas including the new refined engine, its upgraded Super Select 4WD system, its handling and ride comfort, its equipment levels and its overall muscular macho image. What hasn't changed is its immense durability, and, when needed, its impressive off-road capability. It also has a 1,060 kg (2,337 lb) payload and a 3,100 kg (6,834 lb) towing capacity. All this is backed up by a five years/125,000-mile warranty.

The latest L200 still retains its chassis and mounted body construction for strength and durability but it's leaner in weight than before, improving the performance and fuel economy. There is a new face with a prominent chrome grille; subtle it isn't - bold it is. The body is muscular front to rear, with high ground clearance and protective side sill bars leading to the rear. Here there is a substantial bumper with a useful lowered step section in the middle, giving easier access to the load area without having to lower the tailgate. Underneath the vehicle are protection shields. There is a wide range of canopies and roller shutters to cover the load bay to maximise security for carrying expensive tools or goods.

The all-important load bed is 1,470 mm (4.82 ft) long, 1,470mm (4.82 ft) wide but it is 15 mm (0.6 in) deeper than before at 475 mm (18.7 in) so increasing its workhorse payload to 1,060 kg (2,337 lb).



Inside the new models are similar to most large SUVs with five seats, elevated seating positions and a mass of car-like equipment. There is more head and shoulder room in the front and more leg room in the rear - giving it the longest interior space of any double cab currently on sale. Although this Mitsubishi is still classed as a commercial vehicle, the interior is much more in keeping with current SUVs. Every L200 has air-con, LED daytime running lights, bi-xenon headlights, electric windows and heated door mirrors, a clever and easy to use switchable 4x4 system with two/four wheel drive incorporating high/low ratios, hill start assist, cruise control with speed limiter, seven airbags, traction control, trailer stability assist and alloy wheels. Moving up the range items such as DAB radio, lane departure warning, privacy glass, keyless entry with push button start and multi-info display are part of the spec. levels.



The test vehicle...

My test version had the top Barbarian spec, which added leather upholstery, heated front seats, illuminated door sill entry guards, puddle lights, LED mood lighting, soft opening tailgate damper and even more chrome with Barbarian branded door handles and fuel filler cap. A major omission, given the L200's huge length of well over five metres, is front and rear parking sensors. Yes the Barbarian has a rear view camera but the lens soon gets covered with road dirt in the winter weather so the rear view is lost. Parking the L200 can be a major issue as it takes up one and a third parking spaces with its length. Another issue was the intrusive Lane Departure function. This automatically switches on every time the vehicle is started. Once it's turned off it should stay off until it is required.

Powering the Series 5 L200 is a new 2.4 litre, four cylinder all-aluminium turbodiesel engine with variable valve timing. The weight saving of the new engine allows for an official Combined Cycle fuel economy of 39.2 mpg, with CO2 emissions of 189 g/km.

On my week long test, driving with the five speed automatic gearbox, all on-road driving, it returned 33.8 mpg overall and the best figure on a longer motorway journey was 35.3 mpg. Travelling in town on short runs hurt the fuel economy most, returning just 24.5 mpg.

With regard to VED road tax, being classed as a commercial vehicle, the annual cost is £225. For company car drivers the Benefit-in-Kind tax is fixed for commercial vehicles with a figure of £3,150 with owners paying either 20% or 40% of that sum depending on their income tax band. Insurance is Group 10E.

The new engine has a power output of 178 bhp with 430 Nm (317 lb.ft) of torque developed at 2,500rpm. Performance is refined and strong in this pick-up sector, with a top speed of 110 mph, while zero to 62mph takes 10.4 seconds. That is two seconds quicker than the 2.5 litre turbodiesel unit it has replaced.

My test version had the five speed auto gearbox, which is a nice match for this engine, with its fully auto or manual modes - and it has gearchange paddles mounted behind the steering



wheel. A six speed manual gearbox is also available and this reduces the retail price by £1,680. For me the auto box is the one to go for; it makes driving in busy town traffic that much easier and for those who use the L200 as a towing vehicle, the automatic transmission is much kinder on the drivetrain.

Strong and durable...



Towing plays a big part of the use L200 owners give their vehicles, including lifestyle use with caravans, boats or horse trailers. Farmers use them widely now for towing stock and feed trailers, and they seem to have replaced the Land Rover Defender as the vehicle of choice. The Police, rescue services, the airport and port authorities are also prominent users of L200s as well as owner-operator businesses that need

load carrying capacity and passenger space.

The latest edition Super Select 4×4 is operated by a control dial behind the gear lever and this allows changes from 2WD and 4WD on the move at speeds up to 62 mph, with the 4WD mode giving a 40:60 rear-biased torque split for optimum stability. The system also has 4WD high ratio with locked differential and 4WD low ratio locked modes.

This system is the same as used in Mitsubishi's legendary Shogun heavyweight 4×4, and I have used it on both vehicles with the previous generation L200s and the current Shoguns around the World in deep snow conditions, desert sand, roads, tracks and for serious off-road work. It never failed to impress and above all remained totally reliable and durable, just what users want when they are away from civilisation. This makes the system bullet-proof for less adventurous but important business use.

On getting behind the wheel for the first time with the new Series 5 L200 model the first thing I noticed was the improved visibility to the front with its lower profile bonnet and deep



windscreen. The seating position is better as well, and the steering now offers a much tighter turning circle which improves driveability in town traffic or negotiating obstacles off road.

The revamped suspension is still heavy duty, including its front and rear dampers and the rear leaf springs, which are retained for maximum durability for carrying heavy weights and towing. The ride is more agricultural than a modern SUV but it has safe body control through corners and it is comfortable on good road surfaces. Big undulations will produce some suspension bounce and deep potholes will send shudders through the cabin but it is easy to live with and like the rest of the new vehicle, is much improved over the past generation L200s.

VERDICT

The new L200 remains the leader of the pick-up pack in terms of image, refinement and capabilities - so no wonder it goes on reaping in awards and customers.

For: Sets new standards in the double cab pick-up market in terms of refinement, interior space, on/off-road performance and capabilities, macho image, tough and reliable, tax-efficient for business use.

Against: Improved ride quality but it does not match that of a modern SUV, huge to park in town, no front or rear parking sensors, rear view camera lens gets dirty very easily - limiting rear parking vision, intrusive Lane Departure function switches on every time the vehicle is started.



MILESTONES AND WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF:

New Mitsubishi L200 Double Cab Barbarian automatic.

Engine: 2.4 litre, 4 cylinder, aluminium, variable valve timing, turbodiesel.

Transmission: 5 speed auto with manual mode. Super Select 2/4WD with high and low ratio modes.

Power: 178 bhp at 3,500 rpm.

Torque: 430 Nm (317 lb.ft) at 2,500 rpm.



Performance:

0-62mph: 10.4 seconds

Top speed: 110 mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 39.2 mpg (33.8 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 189 g/km, VED commercial vehicle road tax £225, BIK company car tax CV rate of 20 or 40% of £3,150.

Insurance group: 10E.

Warranty: 5 years/125,000-miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 5,285 mm (17.3 ft), W 1,815 mm (6.0 ft), H 1,780mm (5.8 ft), bed length/width 1,470 mm (4.8 ft), payload 1,060 kg (2,337 lb), braked towing weight 3,100 kg (6,834 lb), 4-doors/5-seats. limiting rear parking vision, intrusive Lane Departure function switches on every time the vehicle is started.

Price: £25,199 (£30,238 inc. Vat).