

EVO X RATED



The Mitsubishi Evo X has really captured the imagination and it's great to see a red blooded performance car in Police trim once again. But does the hype measure up to the exacting requirements of day to day policing? Mike Batten has been lucky enough to test drive one to find out.

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When I first saw the Mitsubishi Evo X at the 2008 NAPFM, I was hugely impressed by both the cars appearance and the manufacturer's claims for its performance. The fact that some UK Police forces had already placed orders was a source of envy and at the same time disappointment. I'd never get to drive one!

Well one year on and the previously unthinkable has happened, Hampshire Constabulary have taken delivery of a single Evo X. The car is provisionally tasked to the North of the county to deal with car crime and cross border criminals from Surrey and Thames Valley. So far so good, but I work in the far south. Following a number of phone calls and with the kind permission of our Fleet Manager John Bradley MBE and my boss C/Insp Steve Jefford, I managed to arrange for a three day loan of the car.

All I had to do was pick it up from our work shop facility in Winchester. Although I have now seen a few Evo X's, this would be the first I had even sat in one, let alone driven one. I had a very keen sense of anticipation.

The colour scheme of the Hampshire Evo is battenburg over silver in contrast to the blue of Essex and white of Humber-side. The rear end has the standard red and yellow chevron stripes. Moving on to the styling of the Evo itself, I guess everyone with a passing interest in the design of cars has something to say about it. It seems opinion is divided on the front end; you either love it or loathe it. Personally I think the huge black radiator grille looks mean and aggressive and is entirely suited to the cars ability and reputation.

Climbing in to the Evo, the Recaro sports seats felt firm and comfortable, although the hip hugging lower side supports meant that it was difficult to get completely comfortable with all the equipment I carry on my utility belt. The other

interesting feature is that the seats only adjust forward and back, likewise the rake of the seat back. There is no provision for raising or lowering the seat height. (unless of course that was another button I couldn't find). However, the steering wheel rake is adjustable.

I adjusted the mirrors and then noticed another problem; the huge rear spoiler cuts across the field of view so completely that some vehicles following behind are completely masked. Whilst that doesn't affect the driving experience it makes life a bit irritating when you're trying to read the index or get a view of the driver of the vehicle behind. After all, it's supposed to be an operational Police vehicle. That aside, the interior felt roomy enough and there was a enough headroom for the cabin not to feel claustrophobic.

Once I'd made myself as comfortable as I could, I started it up, with a conventional key, no starting buttons here! That takes away some of the build up, you expect to push a button to fire this car up. The engine produced a satisfying growl and there was a background whistle of turbo and some burbling exhaust. The engine is a two litre turbo charged unit, 0-62 mph is quoted as 4.7 seconds. Whilst no top speed is given in Mitsubishi's official specifications sheet, I have it on good authority from a colleague in Essex Police that they're good for 160 mph. The power is put down via twin clutch system mated to permanent four wheel drive.

Checking out the gear shift, you're immediately presented with a bewildering choice of options, standard automatic, paddle shift, tiptronic, sequential automatic, oh and sport or super sport mode! To be honest, it's too much; all your average Police officer really needs is the auto box with provision for a sequential sport mode. Everything else just complicates matters. To keep things simple I put the car into basic automatic and selected Drive. Twin clutch SST mode? What's that all about? First impressions on driving it out of the yard were positive. The steering wheel is small and grippy, with the paddle shifts easily to hand on either side behind it.



The cabin is a mixture of assorted matt blacks and feels very nicely put together, no creaks or rattles appeared over the three days I had the car. There are 3 analogue dials in front of you, the thing you immediately notice (well I did) is that the speedo is in 20 mph increments and 70 mph appears where 30 mph appears on my normal company car (a BMW)... it goes all the way round to 180 mph and is a clear declaration of the cars potential, if you've got the balls and ability! In between the two analogue dials is a red rectangular digital display which gives basic mpg, fuel gauge and temperature information. Mounted centrally on the top of the dash board is a computer screen, very similar to BMW's i-Drive information screen. I was amused to read the screen saver message which reads, and I quote **"Observe and obey all road signs and traffic rules and drive safely."** I'm not sure if its meant as a reminder or a disclaimer!

Driving out onto the motorway I encountered the first of many reactions from other drivers over the 3 days. Those in the know did a double take, then they did a third and then just openly stared. I started to grin, My smile got wider the further I travelled, Wherever I went the car was the centre of attention, people literally pointed and stared! Travelling down the M3, I didn't push the car but just tried to get a feel for it. The steering was taut and responsive, there was a fair bit of wind noise being transmitted into the cabin from the roof light bar. This unfortunately got louder the faster I went, it wasn't uncomfortable but it was loud enough to be a bit intrusive and when I later picked up my crewmate, it meant conversation was a bit louder than usual.

The drive itself was very good, on the long sweeping motorway curves the car handled beautifully, the acceleration was phenomenal, it really did feel like that old cliché of being able to 'point and squirt' had come true. The ride although firm was never too harsh and felt sure footed and stable, combined with the solid feel it inspired confidence. For the technical among you, the Evo X has McPherson struts and inverted Bilstein shocks at the front, while the rear has multi link suspension, Bilstein shocks and Eibach springs. The whole lot sits on 18" alloys. I spent an hour just getting a feel for the car and then returned to base to pick up my Sergeant. Whilst I was there I loaded up with a few necessary kit items. The boot space is adequate for a patrol car, we had a basic load of 12 cones, three or four collapsible SLOW signs and a stinger, with plenty of space for more (VAUXHALL ARE YOU READING THIS?).

Switching into 'lets get to work' mode our first call was to an RTI on a local road in Southampton. This necessitated a short motorway stint and then a quick sprint through local traffic.... in the rush hour! To say we had fun is somewhat of an understatement. I often find that although you can go faster on the motorway, its more exhilarating to drive at lower speeds on narrower roads. The experience this time was made special by the fact that everyone was staring at the car! As I entered the first roundabout in anger, I found out just how responsive the steering is. I put on the same amount of lock as I would use for my BMW and then nearly collided with the central island! It's so sharp, the car is already round before you've registered that its making the turn. It came as a bit of a shock and gave me a wake up call to give the car a bit of respect. Arriving at

the RTI scene we nonchalantly got out to deal, making sure that we appeared as if driving around in an Evo X was one of life's smaller pleasures.

Having finished up it was back on to the motorway for another RTI, this time we had a longer distance to travel so it was time to wind the Evo up. The acceleration was supremely effortless, it was literally, 110...120....130...140... I ran out of road at that point, but the Evo felt like it had loads more in reserve. Road conditions permitting, I imagine 150mph+ would be easily achievable. The nice thing though was that the four wheel drive meant that the car felt planted on the road the whole time, there was never any sense that I had to work to hold it all together. It just got on with the job of getting from A to B as quickly and safely as possible and with the minimum of fuss. That impression was reinforced as the day wore on; nothing seemed to be beyond the cars capability.

Once the sun had gone down I took the opportunity to test the car on minor roads. The Southampton area is no different to anywhere else these days. We have our share of potholes and raised drain covers. Pushing the Evo round town and out into the country was an interesting contrast to the earlier motorway driving. The ride was still firm but it began to feel hard and occasionally crashed into some of the nastier holes. Whilst the cabin still felt solid I had a feeling that I wouldn't want to spend too much time on B roads or I would start to feel uncomfortable. It was more a feeling that, although the car soaked up the worst of the impact, your backside and lower back were also given a share as well! After a while it gets wearing (or I'm just getting old). Another issue that raised its head was that speedometer. It became quite 'interesting' to keep the car at the posted limits, especially when 30 mph doesn't appear at all and is just a gap between two other numbers on the extreme bottom left of the dial. It wasn't helped by the Evo itself which always felt like it wanted to be let loose. Added to that was the shocking fuel economy. The official fuel consumption figures are 19.1 mpg on the urban cycle and 26.2 mpg on the combined. The best I managed was 15 mpg!

Out on unlit roads, the headlights proved to be very good, giving an excellent forward and lateral lit area. A nice touch is the fog lights which come on when you corner to give an extra bit of lateral light in the turn. Let's face it, if your charging towards the horizon in the dark, you need all the help you can get. Another little confidence booster.

Taking the car back to the yard at the end of the first day, I reviewed my 'notes made at the time.' Overall the experience had been hugely enjoyable. There is no doubt the Evo X is a hugely capable car. In fact, unless it is put to work on something like an ANPR Intercept team, I doubt whether its full potential will ever be consistently realised by most Police drivers.

In my opinion, its home will be the high speed pursuit, high visibility policing arena, where a car of this ability will make mincemeat of the opposition. In fact, just its presence will probably be enough to prevent most bad driving from even starting. If the average bad boy isn't too busy just staring at the car, he'll be mentally waving a white flag and accepting defeat. Throughout the entire tour of duty, the car had been an object of intense interest. At one point I got out at one of our local 'unofficial cruise' venues to speak to an Astra driver about his blue headlights and then couldn't get back to the car for the sea of humanity around it! Everyone wanted to look at it, get in it, climb over it, to ask how fast it went and generally admire it.

Whether the EVO X will endear itself to Fleet Managers is another thing. The Hampshire car has already had a coming together with a reckless deer and repairs were costly to say the least. It's a well known fact that life on a Police fleet is hard and there is a standing requirement for a car and its equipment to be 'Policeman proof.' In the current economic climate, the Evo X may remain a rare breed on the UK Police fleet, purely due to running and maintenance costs. But that's not necessarily a bad thing, when you do it makes the driving experience just that bit more special and means the car will hopefully build on its already huge reputation. Roll on EVO XI.