



December 26, 2008

## The electric car that can break the speed limit signals a new road order

*New Mitsubishi can reach 87mph and travel 100 miles without needing a recharge*

Forget milk float. Forget golf buggy. The tarnished image of the electric car is about to be smartened up. The first proper-performance, four-seater electric car from a major manufacturer is about to be launched on the UK market.

The i-MiEV – pronounced eye-meev – from Mitsubishi, is a saloon car which will carry four adults and reach a top speed of 87mph. It will be available in the UK, initially for leasing, from the middle of 2009 and can travel up to 100 miles without charging.

The i-MiEV marks a dramatic leap forward in quality from the vehicles which have so far dominated the electric car market in the UK (and can be sometimes glimpsed chugging about on the streets of London)

Both the Indo-US manufactured G-Wiz and the French-made Mega City are two-seaters strictly limited in specification and performance – the G-Wiz with a top speed of 50mph and a range on a full battery charge of 48 miles, and the Mega City even more restricted, with a top speed of 40mph and a range of 40 miles only.

There has been a market for them because they are environmentally friendly, with zero tailpipe emissions, and also because for one particular type of driving – the short city commute – they have represented a bargain. They are exempt from the congestion charge in central London, easy to park, and in parts of the capital can have their batteries recharged free.

However, in the past year the market has turned against them. A website specialising in environmentally friendly cars, cleangreencars.co.uk, published figures this month showing sales had more than halved in 2008 – 156 electric cars were sold from January to October, compared to 374 for this period in 2007. It was an unexpected trend in a sector that is supposed to be growing.

It happened partly because Westminster City Council in London had ended its previous free parking for electrics, and also because the G-Wiz had performed very badly in a crash test run by Top Gear magazine. But their basic attraction was also coming into question.

Enter the i-MiEV. Not the normal offering from Mitsubishi, better known for rather less environmentally friendly products, such as its Shogun 4x4.

Developed from Mitsubishi's petrol-driven i-minicar, the i-MiEV is fully crash-tested, and offers double the speed of its predecessors. It also offers double the range on a battery charge – 80 to 100 miles – although this, of course, is still the major drawback for a consumer. You won't be using it to drive from London to Glasgow. And it takes six to seven hours to recharge at home.

However, Mitsubishi is convinced there is a serious market for the i-MiEV – which stands for Mitsubishi innovative Electric Vehicle – beginning with companies and organisations which need to be seen to be at the forefront of environmental awareness, and will not be put off by the hefty price tag of £35,000. About 200 will be available for leasing from selected UK dealers next summer, for about £750 per month.

Expensive though it is, there seems little doubt the i-MiEV is showing the way to the future of motoring, as the threat of

climate change grows and transport policy increasingly bears down on vehicle emissions of carbon dioxide, the principal greenhouse gas.

In Britain, the transport sector accounts for more than a fifth of CO2 emissions, and in the recent first report of the Government's new Climate Change Committee, the chairman, Lord Turner, said he could envisage as many as 40 per cent of Britain's cars being electric-powered, or hybrid electric-petrol, by 2020 if the UK is to meet interim targets to counter global warming.

### Road test: Free from emissions

\*The Mitsubishi i-MiEV could be a new dawn for electric motoring. Offering zero emissions from its tailpipe, it is the first crash-tested all-electric four-seat vehicle from a mainstream carmaker that you will be able to buy in the UK.

It is a far cry from the safety-tarnished and low-quality image of the G-Wiz or the trial-only and space-compromised dreams of the E-Mini. The i-MiEV can fit four 6ft adults plus 246 litres of luggage, despite being shorter than a Fiat Panda. The battery pack, which makes the car 200kg heavier than its conventional petrol version, sits under the floor and the 47kW (63bhp) electric motor occupies the space near the rear wheels.

While the i-MiEV is easy, and nearly silent, to drive, reducing the car's 80-100 mile range is easy too. We drained two-thirds of its charge on our 25-mile test. Recharging takes seven hours via a conventional three-pin plug or up to 80 per cent in 20 minutes via a unit (the size of a vending machine) that Mitsubishi intends to lease with the car. Mitsubishi expects to lease all its 200-unit UK allocation for 2009 for about £750 per month (equivalent to £35,000 bought outright).

Mitsubishi says 100 miles will cost just 45p of electricity and zero road tax would offset its initial high cost. Prices should come down as production increases but still expect to pay £15,000-£20,000 by 2011.

### Specifications:

*\*Torque: 133lb ft*

*\*Performance: 0-62mph in 13.0secs, 87mph top speed*

*\*CO2 emissions: Nil*

*\*On sale: Autumn 2009*

### Guy Bird



© 2008 Independent News and Media. Permission granted for up to 5 copies. All rights reserved.

You may forward this article or get additional permissions by typing [http://license.icopyright.net/3.7463?icx\\_id=environment/green-living/the-electric-car-that-can-break-the-speed-limit-signals-a-new-road-order-1211420.html?service=PrintICopyright](http://license.icopyright.net/3.7463?icx_id=environment/green-living/the-electric-car-that-can-break-the-speed-limit-signals-a-new-road-order-1211420.html?service=PrintICopyright) into any web browser. Independent News and Media Limited and The Independent logos are registered trademarks of Independent News and Media Limited. The iCopyright logo is a registered trademark of iCopyright, Inc.