

# 4WD BUYERS GUIDE

## MITSUBISHI TRITON

### MEDIUM UTES



**Mitsubishi Motors launched the current-shape Triton in 2007 and the styling caused a ripple in an industry where ute styling had become a point of discussion. Major mechanical changes were subsequently made in 2010.**

A few years back, all Japanese utes looked more or less the same, but in the race to attract recreational-ute buyers in larger numbers the stylists were given their heads. Opinions polarised around the styling cues on the Double Cab Triton vs those on the HiLux.

The front of the new Triton was a dead copy of the Ralliart competition vehicles that then dominated the Dakar event. The Double Cab started off that way, but the rear wall tucked under and forward in a radical departure from the ute design mainstream. In addition, the Double Cab ute tray had relatively low sides and the top edges were cambered, not flat like those on every other ute tray. When surmounted with a tiny canopy the Double Cab looked...er, different.

The 2007 Triton bodywork sat on top of a new chassis and suspension, and while the proved ladder-frame chassis with leaf spring rear suspension design was retained, there were significant changes.



The new front suspension was Pajero-like, with coil springs, concentric dampers and double wishbones, replacing the previous torsion bar arrangement and the back saw the rear axle underslung - under the springs - for additional chassis-to-ground clearance.

The spring pack for Double Cabs was two leaves lighter than the pack for Single Cabs and both spring packs had anti-rattle, interleaf wear plates.

The new front end included rack and pinion steering and claimed class-leading turning circle – in absolute contrast to the wide turning circle of the pre-2007 models.

The powertrain was a mixture of old and new. The 3.5-litre ex-Pajero petrol V6 remained and the Triton picked up the Pajero's 3.2-litre turbo-intercooled diesel four, but with a new common-rail injection system.

The petrol engine's maximum output was 135kW at 4750rpm, with peak torque of 309Nm at 3500rpm.

The diesel's figures were a surprise, because they were lower than the figures for the Pajero engine. The common-rail Triton version had figures of 118kW at 4000rpm and 347Nm at 2000rpm, compared with the older, Pajero engine's figures of 121kW at 3800rpm and 373Nm at 2000rpm.

It was maybe a smart marketing move to keep the ute outputs below those of the wagon, but the real reason was probably that the existing five-speed manual transmission and carry-over, four-speed auto couldn't handle the diesel's potential torque.

The 4WD system was Mitsubishi's Easy-Select part-time arrangement, where, once selected at rest, 4WD could thereafter be engaged at any speed up to 100km/h.

The rear limited slip differential was a Thornton-type LSD that could be fitted with a full locking option. This made the Triton the only stock 4WD in the marketplace with a rear diff that functioned as a powerful limited-slip that could be locked positively as well.



(A Thornton limited slip differential enhances the gear-separation effect that occurs when one side-gear starts to spin. In this four-pinion, two-clutch LSD the pressure rings that transmit gear-separation forces to the clutch packs have V-shaped cutouts that bear against the pins of the central 'cross'. As one side gear spins faster than its opposite number the clutches on that side resist the action and the gear-separation forces are magnified by the ramp action of the pressure rings against the cross pins, as friction tries to rotate the pressure rings.)

Wheels were 16x6 steel on Single Cab and base Double Cab models, shod with 205R16s, and the up-market Double Cabs ran on 16x7 aluminium wheels fitted with 245/70R16s.

All the new models had at least a one-tonne payload rating and could tow a 2.3-tonne braked trailer, with up to 230kg ball loading.

The new Triton cab passed impact tests with a four-star rating, according to Mitsubishi's internal testing. The deformable structure incorporated door anti-intrusion bars, a two-stage collapsible steering column and a pedal structure that was said to reduce the likelihood of lower limb injury.

There were lap/sash belts in all five seating positions and front seat airbags and belt pretensioners were standard. (The passenger-side airbag could be key-switched off, if necessary.)

All GLX-R and GLS Tritons came with standard four-channel ABS brakes, with electronic brake force distribution. The braking hardware remained a combination of discs and drums. ABS was optional on GLX models.

Mitsubishi claimed the largest cab volume and legroom in the ute class in 2007, with particular attention having been paid to the space and seat comfort of rear seat passengers. Even base models came with air conditioning and remote central locking.



The range started with GLX models that were Single or Double Cab, petrol or diesel versions, with manual transmissions.

GLX-Rs were petrol or diesel Double Cabs and petrols could have the automatic transmission option.

The GLS was a manual, diesel-only Double Cab model, with leather upholstery.

GLX-R and GLS models had a power-operated rear glass in the cab rear wall and the GLS model could be specified with a sunroof.

All new Tritons came with a five-year/100,000km bumper-to-bumper warranty and a non-transferable, 10-year/160,000km powertrain warranty.

The 2010 Triton range saw the V6 petrol engine dropped and the introduction of a new variable geometry turbocharged 2.5-litre diesel, to replace the 3.2-litre diesel.

The smaller-capacity engine generates a claimed 131kW at 4000rpm and 400Nm of torque at 2000 rpm – up 11 percent and 17 percent respectively over the previous 4M41 3.2-litre engine. Combined fuel economy figures of 8.3 litres per 100km are claimed.

The not-so-good news was that the old four-speed automatic transmission carried over from the previous model and couldn't handle that much torque, so auto-trans Triton models are capped at 350Nm of torque. Even the GLX-R model with its electronically controlled five-speed automatic has an engine torque cap. Combined fuel economy is a claimed 9.3 litres per 100km.

Mitsubishi's All Terrain Technology (MATT) is standard on all GLX-R models and features Super Select 4WD, Active Stability & Traction Control, Multi Mode ABS, Electronic Brake Force Distribution and an optional diff lock.

All post-2010 Tritons have standard driver and front passenger SRS airbags, front and rear door impact bars, ABS brakes with electronic brake force distribution, front seatbelt pretensioners and child restraint points.

Criticism of the tiny cargo box on Dual Cabs saw a 2010 introduction of a long-bed ute body with a length of 1505 mm and height of 460 mm.

Towing capacities were also increased, with a maximum of 2700 kg on Dual Cab 4WDs and 3000 kg on all other 4WD models.

For 2011 Mitsubishi re-introduced the Club Cab as a manual-transmission ute or cab/chassis with bucket seats, flip-up occasional-use rear seats, lever type park brake and floor console with lid and cup holder. Towing capacity is 2700kg.



## On and Off Road

Mitsubishi's off-road competition heritage has always shown up in good ute handling qualities and the Triton continues this trend. The Double Cabs have wagon-like handling, with a tinge of power oversteer available underfoot. There's more bump-steer noticeable in the Single Cab and Club Cab models, but they're easy enough to aim where you want to go.

Ergonomics are excellent, with no need for the driver to reach for any controls. It's odd that the 4WD lever is closer to the driver than the main gear lever, but you soon get used to the layout. The information panel for the trip computer fitted to GLX-R and GLS models is excellent, with simultaneous displays of relevant factors, rather than the usual situation where the driver has to scroll through successive items.

Forward, side and rear vision is very good, but we're not sure about the need for an opening rear glass. You certainly wouldn't want it open when running on dusty roads.

The power-adjustable front seats in the GLS were very supportive and comfortable, but we can't say the same for the GLX and GLX-R seats that were too low-slung for the long legged and lacked under-thigh support.

The standard LSD controlled wayward rear axle behaviour under power, limiting spin on the inside rear wheel.

It worked almost as well as a self-locking diff.

The optional air-actuated diff lock clicked in instantly with the vehicle at rest and didn't disengage automatically as the speed built up, so it worked very well in soft beach sand, where we needed to keep up momentum.

The lock engaged in high or low range. It's supposed to engage with the vehicle moving below 12km/h, but our test vehicles needed to be stationary for the lock to engage. It disengaged quickly when the dashboard switch was touched, or when 4WD was cancelled by moving the transfer case lever.

The Triton's rear axle functionality is one of the best in the 4WD ute market.

Petrol and diesel engines provided good performance and the common-rail version of the 3.2-litre diesel was quieter than the existing Pajero diesel.

Double Cab Tritons rode particularly well, but the Single Cabs were noticeably more 'choppy'.

The post-2010 2.5-litre isn't enough to keep Mitsubishi at the forefront of ute performance, given the release of the VW Amarok and, more significantly, the 2011 Ford Ranger and Mazda BT-50 ranges.

Our bush testing of automatic-transmission Tritons indicates that Mitsubishi needs a five- or six-speed auto post-haste, to allow the engine to achieve its 400Nm potential.



## Previous Models

The previous-shape Mitsubishi Triton MK model was introduced in 1996, as was then the most comprehensive 4WD ute range in the market, including the only V6-powered 4WD ute. The new Triton body design meant that cab/chassis and Club Cab variants had reasonable accommodation, but the Double Cab had a cramped back seat, which was really suitable only for kids.



Mitsubishi had the dubious distinction of boasting the most expensive medium-sized Japanese ute in its range, but at \$46,470, the Double Cab V6 with its prominent aluminium wheels and over-fenders was a lot of ute. The workhorse variants were competitively priced in the \$32,400 to \$37,200 bracket.

Having a three-litre V6 gave the Triton an edge over all its medium-sized 4x4 ute competitors, who relied on four-cylinder petrol engines. With 109kW and 234Nm of torque, the Triton's bent six outclassed the opposition's 75-92kW and 185-205Nm. Even the new petrol four was no slouch, with 97kW on tap.

However, Mitsubishi made a strange diesel engine selection for the MK Triton, replacing the old 2.5-litre turbo-diesel with a naturally aspirated version of the Pajero's turbocharged and intercooled 2.8. The Triton's 2.8-litre wasn't much of an improvement over the aged 2.5, producing 71kW and 198Nm – only nine kilowatts more than the turbocharged 2.5 and with almost the same torque. By way of contrast the turbo-intercooled version in the Pajero was good for 92kW and 292Nm.

Mitsubishi's involvement in off-road racing must have rubbed off on production machines, because the Triton range was the best handling of the light 4WD commercial pack. Although no match for coil-sprung wagons, including Mitsubishi's own Pajero, the Triton could be punted on fast dirt with confidence, suffering less from roll-induced oversteer than other 4WD utes. Off-road the Triton wouldn't go where an all-leaf-sprung HiLux would, but then neither would any of the Japanese utes with wishbone front ends.

In 1998 Mitsubishi gave the Triton range minor tweaks, with intake noise reduction in the diesel models and some interior trim improvements.



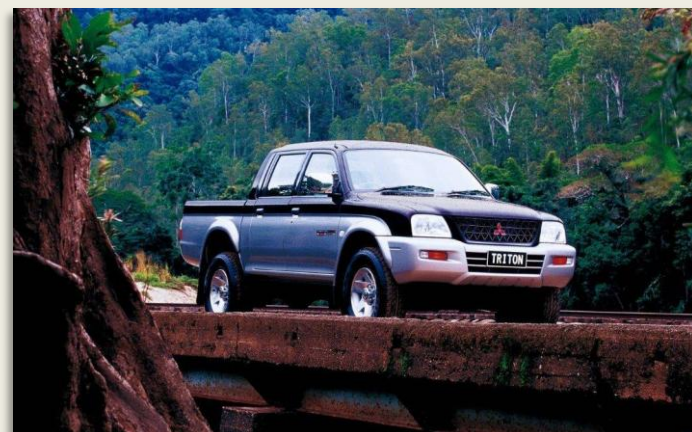
In August 2000 Mitsubishi added two new manual diesel variants – a GLX Club Cab and a GLS Double Cab – and made the INVECS II intelligent-logic automatic transmission an option on the V6 GLS Double Cab model.

In September 2001 all Tritons received new front bumpers, new headlamps and side turn lamps with white lenses, new radiator grilles, new rear combination lamps and new interior trim materials. GLX and GLS Double Cab models had an AM/FM radio/single-CD audio unit as standard.

Top-of-the-line GLS models picked up unique headlamps, 16-inch aluminium wheels (replacing 15-inchers), twin-pot front brake callipers, unique front sports seats and optional dual SRS airbags. Remote keyless entry also became available on the top-of-the-range GLS Double Cab petrol and diesel models.

In mid-2003 the Triton finally scored the Pajero's 2.8-litre intercooled turbo-diesel, replacing the naturally aspirated unit.

The addition of turbocharger and intercooler had a marked effect on performance of the diesel Triton. The 0-80km/h acceleration time came up nearly 30 per cent quicker (in 9.7 seconds, down from 13.8 seconds). Overtaking in fourth gear from 40-60km/h was reduced from 7.8 to 5.7 seconds, and 80-100km/h was reduced from 10.1 to 5.8 seconds.



The performance improvements came without any fuel economy penalty.

Transmission for the turbo diesel Triton was a five-speed manual with Mitsubishi's Easy Select part-time 4WD system.

Also in 2003, the Triton received some revisions to improve occupant comfort. At the same time all engines met Euro II emission standards.

All models picked up an AM/FM radio/single-CD head unit that was CD-stacker compatible. The units had improved LCD readability and revised features – a 'pause' button was added and the clock was deleted.

Air conditioning became a standard fitment on GLS Double Cab models, along with chrome interior door handles and revised luxury knit seat trim. Chrome front grille, exterior door and tailgate handles completed the exterior upgrade.

Driver and passenger SRS airbags and leather-wrapped steering wheel were optional on GLS (manual variants also included leather-wrapped transfer and gearshift levers as part of this pack). Airbags continued to be optional on all other V6 models.

The last Triton MK upgrade was in March 2005, with the introduction of a crew cab model that slotted between the \$44,490 GLS turbo-diesel Double Cab ute and the \$37,490 GLX version. The new GLX-R model retailed for \$38,990 in both petrol V6 and turbo-diesel configurations.



Pre-2003 Tritons are a fairly lacklustre lot, with the exception of the three-litre petrol V6 models. Post-2003 Tritons with the 2.8-litre turbo-diesel engine are preferred over the three-litre petrol six that had a narrow operating band between peak power – 133kW at 5250rpm – and maximum torque – 255Nm at 4500rpm – and worked best in front of the four-speed automatic. The gruntier diesel came only with the five-speed manual transmission.

Don't even consider buying a V6 petrol Triton that's been fitted with an LPG kit. Of the major suppliers in the 4WD market, only Mitsubishi used to be strongly against gas fuel for its V6 engines, until the LPG-compatible 3.5-litre was introduced to the Pajero range.

Mitsubishi changed the late model 3.0-litre V6's piston rings, valves and valve seat material in an effort to meet the demands of LPG combustion heat, but the engine still suffered from valve seat recession.

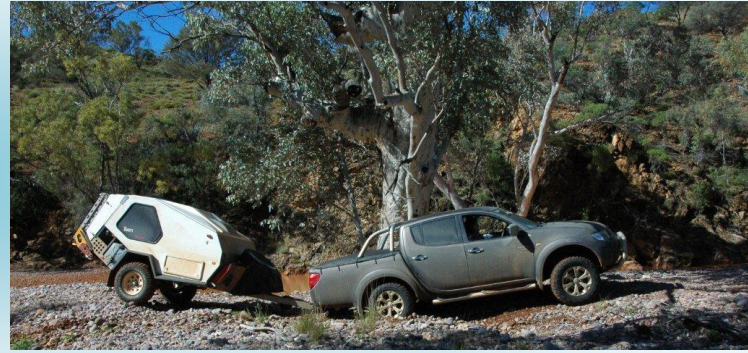
The Triton has been built in Thailand since the MK introduction in 1996 and build quality has been generally very good. The Triton doesn't suffer from any specific failures, but as always, regular servicing is critical.

Make sure you get a Triton that's been well looked after. Petrol engines suffer from clogged oilways if not serviced as per the manufacturer's specifications and the pre-chamber diesel loads its oil with combustion soot very quickly. Diesels need to have been oil-drained every 5000 kilometres.

## Bush Modifications

Tritons have been popular since 1996 and so there's a reasonable amount of after-market gear available for them – particularly for Double Cabs.

Ground clearance is marginal, so a 50mm suspension lift is welcome. Long range fuel tanks increase bush driving range.





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