

OZROAMER 2017 7 SEAT 4WD \$45,000 - \$60,000 AWARD



One of the hottest market segments in 2017 is the 7 seat 4WD Ute based wagons with entrants from Isuzu, Ford, Holden, Toyota and Mitsubishi. With all this competition, the winning margin has reduced to a single point. If you go back 6 years there was only the Mitsubishi Challenger. Now there is a complete new segment. This is great news for 4WD consumers, as the availability of affordable 4WD family wagons was diminishing dramatically.

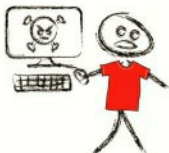
The four finalists include the multiple previous winner, the excellent and recently revamped Isuzu MU-X LST, Toyota's complete entrant the Fortuner GXL, Mitsubishi's Pajero Sport Exceed and Holden's all new Trailblazer LTZ .

Thankfully this segment exists as otherwise the genuine 4WD wagons would also be non existent. These vehicles offer a genuine alternative for the adventurous family that wishes to do more than drive on dirt roads. These will allow families to take that outback touring holiday at a reasonable price.

All four of these have similar philosophies in design and intended use and in reality if you bought any of them you would be happy with your purchase. There are a couple of slight differences though. It should be noted that this was a hotly contested category and the winner is by a very slim margin, such is the competitive nature of the segment. It often depends on where the vehicle is in it's model life cycle as to the competitive advantage.



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ISUZU MU-X LST 4WD**\$53,707 RDAP**

The competitive advantage that the Isuzu MU-X has always had is its stylish good looks, exemplary road manners, rugged off road capability, outstanding reliability, durability, longevity and renowned value for money. There have been some shortcomings but overall it has been extremely successful and rightly so.

by Rob Fraser



The Isuzu MU-X LST has long been a favourite here at OzRoamer, having won the coveted '7 Seat 4WD \$45,000- \$60,000' three times since it was originally launched. It has always been a well-balanced 4WD that had outstanding ride and handling considering it is Ute based. The problem is that over the ensuing years the competition has moved forward and the Isuzu has stayed the same.

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Enter the revised 2017 model update that addresses many of the shortcomings of the previous model but with the improvements there are still some areas that need attention. More on that later. Externally there is a redesigned grille and headlight assembly that has a more assertive appearance and houses the new Bi-LED projector and provide increased night visibility. One impressive

feature, especially given that the MU-X is often used as a tow vehicle, is the fact that the new Bi-LED projector headlights are also equipped with an auto-levelling feature, which automatically adjust the headlight beam to the appropriate angle whenever the MU-X is loaded with a complete complement of passengers, heavy cargo and towing.

This, combined with excellent high beam, ensures safe driver vision when driving at night, and increases safety for all road users by reducing oncoming glare.

New design front fog lights allow for increased driver visibility at night or during inclement weather. Complementing the fresh exterior look, is a stylish new design 18-inch alloy wheel with All-Terrain (AT) tyres.



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One area where the previous MU-X needed improved was internal styling. The interior was a little basic previously with hard plastic surfaces everywhere. The MU-X's interior styling has been extensively refined, with the passenger cabin now featuring a dual-tone dashboard with some soft touch finishes, new chrome and piano-black trimming, and new soft touch armrests and console coverings providing a more refined ambience.

In addition, new quilted design leather-accented seats feature in LS-T variants. These seats are a vast improvement over the previous model that were a little hard and flat and left you with a numb bum after a full days driving. Unfortunately, there is still no lumbar adjustment nor tilt feature for the seat squab. The long leg drivers will need to stretch for the steering wheel as there is no reach adjustment for it.

Another improvement is the new an 8-inch touch screen display audio system, with in-built Sat Nav and reversing camera. For those audiophiles amongst buyers, the 17MY MU-X LST now houses eight speakers delivering crisp, clear audio for all occupants: two roof mounted speakers in addition to the two front door mounted speakers, two dash mounted tweeters and two rear door mounted speakers. LS-T variants also boast a fold-down roof-mounted 10-inch DVD screen which can be easily viewed by both the second and third row occupants. The remote control unit allows both the DVD and audio functions to be conveniently controlled from anywhere in the vehicle.

For the plug in people there are three USB ports, two are located in the front dash and one in the rear, providing convenient charge points for mobile phones and other portable devices with USB charge ports. The covers are a little finicky to remove and if I owned the MU-X, I would probably just remove them altogether. For heavier-duty power requirements, there are three 12 Volt power outlets, located in the centre dash console, glove-box and rear cargo area.

Storage is another highlight with 12 cup holders and 18 storage solutions! I am so glad that Isuzu kept the clever slide out cup holders in front of the side air vents. Unfortunately Holden has removed them, which in my opinion is daft. There are cup holders everywhere, plenty of good storage bins and no shortage of places to put things. It is really well laid out.

Front seat occupants are well catered for with comfortable seats and plenty of room. Middle row passengers have adequate leg, head and shoulder room, however if the front seats are all the way back the knee room is restricted. For access to the rear seats there is a clever folding-rolling second row seat arrangement that makes passenger access to the third row seating relatively easy.



by Rob Fraser



The third row seats are okay for taller passengers but better for children or early teens. I just can't help the feeling that the third row of seats in all the Ute based wagons are an afterthought, although these do fold flat to provide a long and spacious storage area. The storage bin behind the seats just seems like it doesn't fit. Isuzu aren't alone in this. The Toyota Fortuner has those ridiculous fold up seats, the Mitsubishi Pajero Sport rear seats simply don't work well and the Trailblazer and Everest have issues.

One of the big features on the MY17 MU-X is the significant improvement in NVH (Noise, Vibration and Harshness) comfort levels that have been achieved. This, in large, is thanks to the addition of new sound and vibration insulation across the vehicle, including to the dash console, floor transmission tunnel, windscreen seal, firewall and floorplan. Road noise is noticeably quieter, less overall wind noise (although still a little around the rear view mirrors) and less noticeable engine rumble, although still enough to be pleasant if you like diesel rumble as I do.

The other big news item is the improved engine capability. The new Euro 5 compliant engine was introduced when the revised D-Max was launched earlier this year. Although the Isuzu engine was rarely found lacking, it was lagging behind competitors in figures not application. We should be extremely thankful to the Isuzu staff here in Australia because they fought hard to retain the 3.0L engine and make the improvements needed.

It will prove to be a very clever business decision I'm sure as we Aussies like our capacity in our engines. The new Euro5 emission compliant 3.0 litre 4JJ1-TC Hi-Power turbo-diesel power plant is a world first for Isuzu. It was developed exclusively for the Australian market, after exhaustive local research and testing into the use and demands of existing Australian Isuzu owners, and no other market currently features an Isuzu 3.0 litre Euro5 compliant engine.

The key feature is that maximum torque output has been increased to 430Nm from the previous engine's output of 380Nm to meet the demands of Australian operating conditions and customer's expectations. However, being Isuzu and having all that truck experience, they understand that a shallow peak torque figure, while sounding good, often translates poorly to the real world use. In comparison to the previous engine, 380Nm of torque (previous maximum) is now on tap from 1,700 – 3,500rpm – which is 100 rpm lower and continues 700 rpm higher – meaning the same engine rpm provides more power and the same torque can be generated at lower engine rpm.

By producing more power at lower engine rpm and more torque, the new Euro 5 engine is not only more fuel efficient and produces less toxic exhaust emissions, but still delivers relaxed almost lazy drive-ability, especially when under load.

by Rob Fraser



To cope with the increased torque Isuzu has introduced a new Aisin AWR6B45 6-Speed Automatic Transmission with “lock-up” torque converter. This ensures that drivers of the MU-X are provided the most efficient gear selection to suit a wide variety of driving conditions – further improving fuel efficiency and lowering CO2 emissions. What all this means in real terms is that the Isuzu MU-X is now an even better 4WD and tow vehicle.

All variants of the MU-X are equipped with a reversing camera and rear park assist (RPA). They offer an extensive and impressive level of occupant protection; six airbags (dual front, side and full-length curtain), 4-channel 4-sensor anti-skid brake system (ABS) with electronic brakeforce distribution (EBD), electronic stability control (ESC), traction control system (TCS) and emergency brake assist (EBA), as well as hill start assist (HSA) and hill descent control (HDC).

There are height adjustable head restraints for all occupants and dual pre-tensioners with load limiters for the front seatbelts, along with ISO-FIX child restraint points in the second row. What the MU-X is lacking are some of the more recent additions to competitors like the Holden Trailblazer, with blind spot indicators, forward collision warning and rear cross traffic alert etc.

The Isuzu MU-X has always been a robust reliable 4WD wagon. Front independent double wishbone suspension with coil springs, gas shocks and stabiliser bar, allows the driver positive feedback and steering control regardless of the terrain underfoot, and a rear five-link suspension configuration also with coil springs, stabiliser bar and gas shocks, provide stability and generous wheel articulation when traversing off road.

All 4x4 variants of the MU-X offer a reasonable level of ground clearance, for true off-road capability. For added protection, 4x4 models are also equipped with a 2mm steel front skid plate, steel sump and transfer case guards plus protection for the leading edge of the fuel tank when travelling off-road.

Further confidence is provided with hill descent control (HDC) which assists driver control by controlling the vehicle’s brakes to maintain a constant low speed when descending steep slopes or on slippery off-road surfaces. Increased driver control means increased safety, and importantly, HDC is offered on all Isuzu MU-X variants, including 4x2 models.

ISUZU MU-X LST 4WD

\$53,707 RDAP

by Rob Fraser

Model	Isuzu MU-X LST
Model Price	\$53,707 RDAP
Engine	3.0 L 4 Cyl TDi
Drivetrain	6 Sp AT 4WD
Power	130kW @ 3,600rpm
Torque	430Nm @ 2,000rpm
Safety	5 STAR ANCAP
CO2	214g/km
Economy ADR	8.1L/100 km
Servicing	5 Yr Service Plan
Tow Rating	3,000kg
Tow Ball Rating	300kg
Warranty	5 Yrs / 130,000 km 5 Yrs Roadside Assist



We tried this on the launch on two occasions, once descending the 45 degree ramp that was set up and another time on a fairly steep rugged trail descent. Both times the HDC performed effortlessly and without much noise or fuss. There is however no real diff lock option that seems to be prevalent on the MU-X competitors.

So overall the MY 17 updates are a significant improvement over the outgoing model, with more torque from the Euro 5 engine and a better delivery spread, better NVH comfort levels, redesigned interior, upgrades to the headlights, a new 6 speed AT transmission and improvements to the audio and Sat Nav systems.

There are however some shortcomings that remain, especially as the market place expects more from its vehicles every year. Simple things like reach adjustable steering wheel, lumbar support, blind spot indicators and forward collision warning, rear diff lock, auto headlights and wipers, air conditioned front seats etc. These are features that seem to be becoming standard on this class of vehicle now and hopefully can be introduced on the MU-X before too long.

If you are looking for a robust, honest, durable, reliable 4WD or tow vehicle you would find it hard to pass the MU-X LST over. The Isuzu MU-X remains a firm favourite here at OzRoamer, simply because of its capabilities and no fuss attitude to delivering a relaxed driving experience. It has the smoothest ride of all the Ute based wagons.

All Isuzu vehicles now come with the Isuzu Service Plus 555. This includes a 5 year warranty, 5 years Roadside Assistance and 5 year/50,000 kilometre Capped Price Servicing program – which adds further peace of mind when it comes to protecting your investment and your wallet.



What's Good:

- Towing performance
- Ride and handling
- Robustness

What's Not:

- Some safety features missing
- No reach adjustable steering wheel
- No driver lumbar adjustment

Overall OzRoamer Rating: 91/100

Behind the Wheel	8	Practicality	10
Comfort	9	Fit for Purpose	9
Equipment	9	Towing Ability	9
Performance	9	Off Road Ability	10
Ride & Handling	9	Value for Money	9