By Steve Schaefer

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Mitsubishi has gone through some changes over the last few years. Some of the old favorite models, such as the rugged Montero Sport Ute and American-built Eclipse, are gone, along with the stalwart Galant midsized sedan. Now, the compact Outlander Sport crossover has become the brand's biggest seller.

I first drove this pleasant little model almost exactly two years ago, when it was introduced. Since then, it's picked up a "Top Safety Pick" award from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and has helped move the metal at Mitsubishi dealers. With its RISE (Reinforced Impact Safety Evolution) body design technology, it protects occupants and shields against damage to the fuel system in a rear collision.

Its looks have worn well, so the 2013 version isn't heavily changed. Yeah, there's a pretty significant revision to the bold, Lancer-inspired big-mouthed face, with new grille and fog lamps. New side sills integrate nicely with the revised rear bumper. Every Outlander Sport now comes with 18-inch alloy wheels — no cheap steels. There are also two new colors. This is what you do when a car enters its third year to keep it fresh.

Inside, it's now quieter because of better insulation, and the seat fabrics are upgraded. From a health standpoint, the interior materials are lower in volatile organic compounds.

You can pick from the ES or higher-level SE model. Do you think the assembly plant has one barrel of chrome "S"s and one of "E"s and just switches them depending on which model is coming down the line? At least the name "Outlander" sounds like something you'd take on an adventure.

Carrying over is the durable, proven 148-horsepower 2.0-liter four cylinder. The EPA thinks fairly highly of this one, with an average of 27 miles per gallon (24 City, 31 Highway). That's not

going to impress any Prius owners, but it is better than the big old SUVs of yore. I earned 24.2 mpg, but a lot of my driving is in commute traffic, so your mileage could be significantly better.

There's a manual five-speed transmission available in the ES model, but you can order up an upgraded continuously variable automatic. The SE comes only with the automatic, with a contrived six-speed manumatic sport setting.

With its crossover SUV configuration, the Outlander Sport hauls stuff easily but still feels contained and taut in town. It sits up nice and high for seeing over folks driving sedans in the daily commute. You can take the thing off road if you want, but you'll probably want to order up four-wheel drive. My Rally Red tester had only two-wheel drive, which is fine for most folks.

Every Outlander Sport is pretty well stocked with stuff when it arrives. Inside, there's a 140-watt stereo system and a leather-wrapped shift knob and steering wheel. Every car these days has

things like power windows, locks and mirrors, but the Outlander Sport also provides a full USB connection for your music and Bluetooth for your phone — and the FUSE hands-free link system. Interesting that this is the first car in which I've connected my phone with Bluetooth using only voice commands.

The SE has more stuff than the ES, including standard SiriusXM Satellite Radio, two more speakers to hear it with, high-intensity-discharge (HID) headlamps, automatic climate control, keyless entry, rain-sensing wipers (normally a luxury car feature), and more.

My SE tester featured two nice options. For one, it seemed like the entire roof was one huge panoramic moonroof. It doesn't open, but it does expose everyone to lots of sunlight, and it has cool lights around the edges that are a date-impressing novelty at night. The 710-watt Rockford Fosgate audio system, with subwoofer, added significantly better sound, although the speakers themselves didn't seem that special.

The Outlander Sport saves Mitsubishi a lot of taxes by being built in the good old U.S.A., but local content is only 20 percent. The engine and transmission are Japanese. Assembly quality felt fine to me, and I certainly had no issues during the car's brief stay.

There's nothing that remarkable about the way it drives — it's smooth and quiet where it needs to be, even though continuously variable transmissions don't make a sporty gear change sound. The 148 horsepower is not exhilarating with 3,120 pounds to move, but it's no slug either.

The Outlander Sport starts out pretty inexpensive, to compete against a variety of models, from Hyundai Tucsons to Honda CR-Vs to Toyota RAV4s. The ES begins at $19,995, including shipping. My SE, with two-wheel drive but the fancy roof and powerful audio system, came to $27,170. Without the packages it would total just $23,000.

Who’s buying the new Outlander Sport? Folks who know a good value, I’d say.