

= Mitsubishi i =

The Mitsubishi i (?? ? i , Mitsubishi i) is a kei car from automaker Mitsubishi Motors , first released in January 2006 , twenty eight months after its debut at the 2003 Frankfurt Motor Show . It is the first four @-@ door automobile since the 1960s to employ a " rear midship " setup with the engine behind the passengers , in an attempt to improve safety and interior space without enlarging the overall exterior .

The innovative layout and styling of the i proved an immediate critical and commercial success , exceeding Mitsubishi 's initial sales targets by 20 percent and winning thirteen awards in its first year . Although designed with the Japanese keijid?sha light automobile class in mind , the attention it generated led to its subsequent introduction in right hand drive markets in Asia , Oceania and Europe . It is also used as a basis of the 2009 i @-@ MiEV battery electric vehicle .

= = Concepts : i , Se @-@ Ro = =

Two prototypes were exhibited during the car 's development . The first was the " i " Concept , which debuted at the 60th Frankfurt Motor Show in 2003 , and previewed the car 's striking exterior . Motoring journalists were quick to seize on the distinctive silhouette , calling it " a very good egg " , and a " crystal ball " with which to see the future of Mitsubishi . One reviewer even speculated it to be an allusion by the vehicle 's French @-@ born designer Olivier Boulay to the Renault 4CV , France 's popular post @-@ war " people 's car " with which the i shared its four @-@ seat , rear @-@ engined layout . Its styling was formally lauded when the i won the Grand Prize at the 50th anniversary Good Design Awards from the Japanese Ministry of Economy , Trade and Industry in October 2006 , the first kei car to win the award .

Explaining the choice of name , the company claimed that " i " could represent the owner (I , the nominative personal pronoun) as an encouragement to personal expression , or innovation , intelligence and imagination , keywords in the car 's development . It was also a play on the Japanese word for love , ? (pronounced [ai]) .

The " i " Concept was powered by a 999 cc powerplant with the company 's Mitsubishi Smart Idling (MSI) system , which turns off the engine automatically when the vehicle is stationary , and can restart it within 0 @.@ 2 seconds . So equipped , Mitsubishi claimed the car was capable of fuel consumption of no more than 3 @.@ 8 litres per 100 kilometres (74 @.@ 3 mpg @-@ imp ; 61 @.@ 9 mpg @-@ US) .

The second prototype , called the Se @-@ Ro and exhibited at the 2003 Tokyo Motor Show , previewed the production model 's more conventional mechanical underpinnings , despite having a more radical appearance which bore little resemblance to the final design . Instead , its polished aluminium body was styled to resemble a zeppelin or airship , which Se @-@ Ro design head Shuji Yamada described as a realization of his fantasies of the future from childhood . The aviation theme continued with the name ; Se @-@ Ro , short for " secret room " , was a veiled reference to the Mitsubishi Zero fighter aircraft of World War II .

= = Technical details = =

= = = Body and dimensions = = =

A lightweight steel (not aluminium) structure and a rear @-@ engined layout allowed Mitsubishi to incorporate a larger front crumple zone , in order to meet current safety legislation requirements without compromising interior space . With no powertrain in front of the driver , the designers were able to shorten the front overhang and lengthen the wheelbase to 2 @,@ 550 millimetres (100 @.@ 4 in) , giving greater legroom for passengers than many comparable kei cars whose wheelbase is typically 130 ? 190 mm (5 @.@ 1 ? 7 @.@ 5 in) less . The downside of this design was a reduction in cargo @-@ carrying capacity , which was necessarily compromised by the

engine 's location in the rear .

== Drivetrain ==

The i has a " rear @-@ midship " engine mounted just ahead of the rear axle , a highly unusual configuration in a small car where front @-@ engine design has dominated since the 1970s . The 3B20 three @-@ cylinder powerplant has an aluminium cylinder block , a displacement of 659 cubic centimetres , and incorporates double overhead camshafts with MIVEC variable valve timing in the cylinder head . Initially only an intercooled and turbocharged engine was offered , until a naturally aspirated version was introduced for 2007 . A four @-@ speed automatic gearbox transmits power to the rear or all four wheels , depending on specification .

== Suspension , brakes and tires ==

MacPherson struts are used in the front suspension , and an unusual three @-@ link De Dion tube / Watt 's linkage is used in the rear . Front discs with anti @-@ lock braking (ABS) and electronic brakeforce distribution (EBD) are standard across the range . In common with many other mid- or rear @-@ engined vehicles its fifteen @-@ inch wheels have uneven @-@ sized tires , 145 / 65 on the fronts and wider 175 / 55 on the rears , in an effort to minimise the chances of oversteer caused by the rear @-@ biased weight distribution .

== Specifications ==

Three individual models , or grades , were available on the car 's release in 2006 ; S , M , and G , in ascending order of price . They all shared the same five @-@ door hatchback body style and turbocharged engine , but offered differing levels of options and standard equipment . In 2007 the base S model was given the new naturally aspirated powerplant , and was positioned below the two new grades , L and LX , whose engine it shared .

== Domestic and international markets ==

Mass production began at the company 's Mizushima plant in Kurashiki , Okayama , in December 2005 , before it was released for sale on January 24 , 2006 . Priced from ¥ 1 @, @ 281 @, @ 000 to ¥ 1 @, @ 617 @, @ 000 , Mitsubishi initially aimed for 5 @, @ 000 cars per month within the domestic market , and managed to exceed its target in its first month by over 1 @, @ 000 . By the end of 2006 , approximately 37 @, @ 000 had been sold . The company has already exported the i to Singapore , Brunei , Hong Kong , and New Zealand , where like Japan they drive on the left , and introduced it to the United Kingdom on July 1 , 2007 , with a price of UK £ 9 @, @ 000 and a target of 300 sales per year .

== Annual production and sales ==

== Special editions ==

From July 25 to 31 , 2006 the company displayed a unique Mitsubishi i Hello Kitty edition at the Mitsukoshi department store in Tokyo 's Nihonbashi district . Based on the two @-@ wheel drive G model , it had a pink paint scheme with co @-@ ordinated interior , " Princess Kitty " decals on the doors and windows , a ribbon decal on the roof , and themed headrests with small , feline ears . The car , which was described as " the most quintessentially Japanese car ... ever " for fusing two of the country 's cultural icons ? Hello Kitty and keijid?sha ? was eventually sold in a charity auction on behalf of UNICEF .

Other limited production models include the i Play edition , a run of 3 @, @ 000 cars only available

in white or black , and featuring a dashboard @-@ mounted slot for an iPod nano ,

Also 100 of the i Kurashiki edition with faux denim upholstery , to be sold at a single Mitsubishi dealership in Kurashiki , Okayama , the prefecture where the bulk of Japan 's domestic blue jeans manufacturers are located .

1st Anniversary special editions based on the L and M grades were also introduced in early 2007 to commemorate the car 's first year on sale .

= = Electric car version = =

Mitsubishi has given the i a prominent role in the company 's alternative propulsion research projects , developing a version using their MiEV (Mitsubishi innovative Electric Vehicle) technology in 2006 and exhibited at the 22nd International Battery , Hybrid and Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle Symposium & Exposition in Yokohama . MMC provided three power companies with vehicles in 2006 and 2007 in order to evaluate how a " fast @-@ charge " infrastructure might be developed for electric vehicles . Fleet testing by five power companies was conducted later in 2007 , with a view to future public sales between 2008 and 2010 .

The Mitsubishi i MiEV electric car was launched in Japan for fleet customers in July 2009 and for the general public in April 2010 . Sales to the public in Hong Kong began in May 2010 , and a trial began in Australia in September 2010 . Sales in several European countries began in late 2010 and between December 2011 and March 2012 for the United States west and east coasts , respectively .

= = Awards = =

The i won the 2007 Car of the Year award from the Japanese Automotive Researchers and Journalists Conference (RJC) , and two other " Car of the Year " awards , from the Carview Corporation website and the Consumer 's Choice . It also won the " Most Advanced Technology " Special Achievement Award at the 2006 ? 07 Japan Car of the Year awards , where it was nominated unsuccessfully in the overall Car of the Year category , and ranked first in the Japan Mini @-@ Car APEAL Study published by J.D. Power Asia Pacific in October 2006 , with a higher score than any previous winner .

Aside from the 2006 Good Design Grand Prix , its style won Design Awards from the Japan Automotive Hall of Fame (JAHFA) , and the magazines Popeye and Car Styling .