

Date	17 November, 2014
Website	www.zigwheels.com
Edition	Online

## Isuzu MU-7 review

by Anand Mohan, Photography: Preetam Bora Posted on 14 Nov 2014

**The MU-7 is big, burly and intimidating in most rear view mirrors. But is there more to it? We find out**



I have been driving the MU-7 for the better part of the week in Delhi. It's an SUV we've only got the chance to drive recently despite its launch almost a year ago, because over all else, there haven't been any cars around to get our hands on. Now though, the MU-7 is finally here and attainable as a CKD via 11 ISUZU dealers across the country. So we were out to find out if you should buy one.

Being the national capital, the region is bustling with politicians of all cadres and people wielding some sort of power driving cars from Boleros to Scorpios to Fortuners as they move up the ranks. It's the state where power is loved to be shown and an SUV that's large and rare like the MU-7 is, is surely bound to get noticed. I am made aware of the fact when drivers of several Fortuners turn around for a second look of the MU-7 and continue to gaze through their rear view mirrors till I am in them. Small cars make way as soon as they notice the MU-7's menacing presence and making way through traffic is fairly easy because of that. The novelty factor will take some time to wear off as not many MU-7s are seen on Indian roads but its gargantuan proportions will still give it that intimidating stance. I've been engulfed in the attention the MU-7 is getting but it's time to review the car...



### Exterior styling and design: 3

The MU-7 is a lot less about beauty of design as it is about showcasing its brawny character. The SUV is based on the D-Max pickup and is exactly a decade old now. ISUZU says the MU-7 is a tried and tested product so the company wanted to bank on its reliability to build the brand's reputation in India. While this covers the mechanical aspects of the SUV, its dated styling is evident in the way it is put together. The doors require a good yank to open and there's visible beading along the chunky cladding around the car. The MU-7's menacing toothed front grille and functional bonnet scoop stand out though when viewed from the front and as you make your way to the side of MU-7, its 1.8 metre height and almost five metre length give you a sense of space you will find on the inside.



Isuzu needs to bring in the MU-X, which is the MU-7's successor to India once local production commences in 2016 if the company wants to attract customers purely on the design front. The rear is plain and simple and a bit high set as the ladder frame chassis sits underneath. It compromises third row legroom but more on that in the next section.



**Interior and Space: 3**

There was going to be little doubt about space on the inside. The MU-7 is massive longitudinally and it's got a smallish front end, fairly short dashboard and slender door panels. That translates to a room on the inside instead of a car cabin. The middle row splits, slides and folds, all with one lever to make the cabin very flexible. Even the third row can be flipped and folded to get cavernous space on the inside. Then there's the good quality leather upholstery and large front seats and middle row that are going to keep you in comfort over long distances. Under thigh support is good in the middle row and legroom is never an issue even with the front seats pushed all the way back. The driver's seat doesn't get height adjustment and the steering adjusts for rake only and not reach which for a car of the MU-7's price, is a big miss.



The matte finished faux wood inserts polarizes opinion although I quite liked it. The interior otherwise is fairly Spartan and the quality of materials feels a bit low rent. Some nice touches though are the cup holders on the door panels in the middle row and the side facing roof mounted air conditioning vents so cold air isn't in your face. The third row has enough space for kids with short legs because you sit in a knee up position. It's not at all claustrophobic though as large fixed glass windows give excellent view out of the third row.

### **Features and equipment: 2.5**

The MU-7 we reviewed is the double High variant or the 'High' trim with the optional 'High Pack'. This pack includes a double din Audio DVD system with a high quality touch screen. Bluetooth and Aux-in connectivity is there too. You get another roof mounted display unit for the rear passengers, a rear view camera and some splashes on chrome on the inside. It also gets extra front and rear bumper skirts, side steps and a chrome tipped exhaust. On the safety front, you get two airbags and ABS with EBD. It still lacks a crucial few features like automatic climate control, driver seat height adjustment, steering mounted audio and phone controls, and parking sensors. It's a big miss again for a car in this price range.





**Ride and ease of driving: 2.5**

The size and 6.2 metre turning radius make the MU-7 quite cumbersome to maneuver at slow speeds in crowded streets but when you are zipping through traffic on highways, the SUV doesn't feel that wide to squeeze through. On the overall experience of driving one over an extended period, its pickup truck origins

begin to play spoilsport with what is supposed to be a comfortable luxury SUV. The MU-7 rides on independent suspension up front and leaf spring rears. It's well tuned for our roads and you can drive over speed breakers and largish potholes with disdain. But the heft is evident as the shift of mass every time you accelerate and slow down tires you. The MU-7 is undoubtedly a highway car and that's where you begin to appreciate it when the speeds don't vary much. The clutch requires some effort but that is expected. The MU-7 gets short gearing though for the first and second gears and it means you don't have to use it as often once you gain some momentum.



**Engine and performance: 3.5**

Isuzu calls themselves the diesel engine experts so their flagship product better deliver the goods. As expected, the massive 3.0-litre 4-cylinder turbo diesel mill under the hood has plenty of grunt. With 163PS and 360Nm to play with, the 1.9 tonne SUV lunges ahead without any hesitation. Acceleration through gears is even more impressive. At speeds as low as 20kmph and 1000rpm in third gear, the MU-7 doesn't protest for a downshift and it pulls all the way to about 100kmph before you move up a cog. Gearshifts are smooth although long throws and vibrations through the lever are a bit annoying, giving you that truckie feel.



#### **Handling and Braking: 2.5**

Now you don't expect a full size SUV to be much of a handler, and if you do, you'd have to invest in a BMW X5 or higher. But predictable and controllable manners can be expected and with the MU-7 you will not be disappointed. Sure there is considerable body roll but it isn't hairy until you are giving it the beans. The weight in the steering keeps you interested and loads of available torque driving the rear wheels can make it fun on gravel. It's a 4x2 so don't try taking the MU-7 on loose surfaces. The brakes could have offered more bite. While they are progressive, they rob you off some confidence at high speeds.



**Price and fuel efficiency: 3**

Priced at Rs 21.95 lakh, ex-showroom Delhi for the top end variant, the MU-7 is cheaper than the Endeavour and Fortuner by about Rs 1 lakh and that brings the SUV into some consideration. As far as efficiency goes, the MU-7 has an ARAI certified mileage of 12.08kmpl but in the real world, you will get a figure in the range of 9kmpl.

**Verdict: 3**

There is one absolute reason to buy the MU-7 and that is its sheer intimidating appeal. It's a reason why most 4x2 Fortuners are sold. Another good reason to buy this full-size SUV is the novelty factor. These are superficial reasons though. The MU-7 has a good torquey diesel mill with well-chosen ratios and a comfortable cabin to be in over long distances so if you are one for long road trips with a group of adults, the MU-7 is a sensible choice. But it isn't attractive or luxurious or even polished enough to give you that premium SUV feel. It also falls short on the features front a vehicle north of Rs 20 lakh. The MU-7 then firmly falls into the pack of second string seven seater SUVs aspiring for the success Toyota has achieved with the Fortuner. The attention it gets does give the MU-7 half a star more in my books though.