

# Isuzu MU-X Review: A proper utilitarian SUV but worth the price?

In a world where most SUVs are loaded with comfort features, the Isuzu MU-X comes across as a proper utilitarian, as well as, a functional vehicle. However, is it worth the price tag it commands?

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Isuzu has been in the country for over three decades with its set of commercial vehicles through a tie-up with SML (Swaraj Mazda Limited) and since then the way forward for the two companies has been a gradual progress. In the passenger vehicle segment, however, the company entered as a separate entity and was a bit late with the introduction of the Isuzu MU-7 and later on the D-Max V-Cross, a pickup truck. While the MU-7 did catch the attention of potential buyers, the D-Max V-Cross was the one to

prove its ground in a rather uncharted territory in the Indian automotive market. Now, the Japanese carmaker has launched the MU-X at a competitive price tag with the Toyota Fortuner and the Ford Endeavour in its sight. But, is the MU-X worth the price it commands? We see what are the hits, misses and if it is worth spending your money on one.

Before we get to the design language, there is one more thing to clarify. The MU-X's starting price tag of Rs 23.99 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi is around Rs 5 lakh cheaper than its SUV competitors. It also happens to be in the MPV space which has been dominated by the Innova Crysta and a testimony of the same was witnessed when I went to pick the car up. A customer was contemplating between the MU-X and the Innova Crysta (not the top-end variant) and started to get inclined towards the SUV for its butch design language.

## Design



The Isuzu MU-X shares its underpinnings with the D-Max V-Cross which means a number of design elements have also been kept intact to keep the cost in check. The front is exactly the same as the pickup truck with dual-headlamp units that have a projector beam, a large dual slat grille that has oodles of chrome and small fog lamps. Like its pick-up truck sibling, the MU-X front is equally dominating and the large bumper

accentuates it further. The minute change between the two models here is that the SUV gets Daytime Running Lamps in order to add a premium appeal to the rugged front. The side is also carried forward from the pickup truck with flared wheel arches that add the butch character to this rather large SUV. The alloy wheel is now larger (17-inch unit compared to the 16-inch offered with the D-Max V-Cross) with a 255/65 section tyre. The diamond cut alloy wheels add to an upmarket character. A strong shoulder line runs through the entire length which adds a dynamic feel, however, unlike the front, the rear of the MU-X has a more docile design with a large tail lamp section adding to the premium appeal Overall, the design, although similar to the pickup truck offered by Isuzu, has the right balance between premium design language and a butch character in the MU-X

### **Interiors**



The interiors of the Isuzu MU-X can be best termed as functional! There is no leather upholstery added on the dashboard like the Toyota Fortuner, or the use of material isn't at par with the competitors, however, it has all the features one would expect from a premium SUV. These include AC vents for each row with automatic climate control, a touchscreen infotainment system with 10 speakers, steering mounted audio controls, leather upholstery for the seats and door panel. The material quality, as well as the

plastic quality, isn't as premium as its competitors, but it still has a reasonable feel to it.

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In addition to the touchscreen infotainment unit, what comes across as a practical addition is the presence of a roof mounted screen which is connected to the infotainment system offering a video playback ability for the rear passengers. The rear screen can play movies via the USB port or the DVD player and in concern of safety, the output of the rear screen is not replicated on the touchscreen unit up front. So, while the driver is focussed on the road, second and third-row passengers can enjoy their dose of entertainment on the move. A company fitted addition such as this adds to a bit of exclusivity to the package. The missing bit here is the absence of a navigation system which is available in the international models. That said, for a potential buyer, it would still not be a deal breaker since the MU-X has a competitive price tag.



Seating five tall occupants in the Isuzu MU-X is effortless and with the wide opening doors, getting in or out is easy. Seat bolstering is also impressive, so is the back support, but what took the cake here is impressive under thigh support even in the second row. Passengers above six feet in height will be particularly sold off by the comfort level the seating offers. The third row isn't very practical and can maybe seat an average adult -- only --- for short trips. That said, this is a limitation in all premium SUVs that are sold in the Indian market today which is yet again not a deal breaker for a potential customer.

### **Engine & Transmission**

The Isuzu MU-X is available only with one engine and gearbox option. The 3.0-litre diesel unit which generates 174 hp of power at 3,600 rpm and 380 Nm of torque from 1,800 rpm to 2,800 rpm is mated to a 5-speed automatic transmission. Numbers aside, the gearbox, for a torque converter, is an extremely refined unit which has negligible shift shocks while changing from one gear to another. If the right foot is planted hard on the floor, the MU-X lunges forward eagerly like a stabbed rat. NVH or Noise, Vibration

and Harshness levels can be best termed as satisfactory as the diesel motor, known to be an extremely reliable unit internationally, has a slightly crude sound to it.

That said, the response from the powertrain is impressive, irrespective of the road condition and right from keeping a light throttle input to pushing the MU-X hard, the engine does not break a sweat. The model we had for the test also had an all-wheel-drive system with a shift-on-the-fly knob. Switching from rear wheel drive mode to 4H or 4-High mode is just with the flick of a switch while the 4-low or the low-range gearbox can only be engaged when the vehicle is brought to a complete stop and the transmission is engaged in neutral. To sum up the performance of the powertrain, it is a joy to drive on as well as off the road.

### **Ride and Handling**

A premium SUV is expected to offer class leading comfort with acceptable handling. Most customers who buy a vehicle this want it to soak up most undulations without tossing its occupants around. The Isuzu MU-X scores extremely well in this aspect as well with an extremely supple ride quality. Most of the undulations would not be felt and even when the SUV is going over rough terrain, the ride isn't unsettling. The independent coil springs up front and Penta-link setup at the rear offer good road comfort as well as impressive articulation off-road.

The most impressive bit is that despite being a ladder-on-frame chassis, body roll is minimal for its segment. In addition to this, the steering has an impressive feedback and the driver would feel connected to the road at all times. Just point the vehicle in the direction you want to go and it would take you through a corner with absolute grace. If compared to its competitors, the MU-X will have the best handling characteristics.



### **Safety**

While the competitors offer at least six airbags, the MU-X is available only with dual front airbags. This may be a limitation to some intellectual buyers who would want complete safety for the occupants. However, the safety package in the Japanese SUV does not end at just airbags. Like its rivals, it is offered with ABS (Anti-lock Braking System), EBD (Electronic Brakeforce Distribution), ESC (Electronic Stability Control), traction control, hill hold assist and a reverse parking camera. What it misses out on is a downhill assist system which is very useful while off-roading through a steep decline. This system manages the speed of the vehicle while downhill by engaging the brakes repeatedly. So, the MU-X, if taken off-road should be driven by a seasoned driver. Overall, the safety package offered in the premium SUV can be best termed as adequate which is not a bad thing at all.

### **Verdict**

The Isuzu MU-X is available in two trims, 4X2 and 4X4, the latter being the fully loaded one. Both the variants are available with automatic transmissions with the lower variant priced at Rs 23.99 lakh and the top-end one offered at Rs 25.99 lakh, both prices ex-showroom Delhi. It does miss out on a premium appeal and some features but instead offers some unique to the segment like the roof mounted DVD screen. As an overall

package, the MU-X has all the right boxes checked in terms of being a utilitarian SUV with the right amount of features. What will be a challenge for Isuzu is to bring about a positive brand perception in a segment where other manufacturers have been present for a considerable time. Knowing the Japanese carmaker and its expertise for SUVs and pick-up trucks, the MU-X is a clear winner, but it has to shoulder a lot of responsibility.