

Mitsubishi i-MiEV



By Tim Barnes-Clay, Motoring Writer
www.carwriteups.co.uk Twitter: @carwriteups

THIS TINY electric car terrified me. I was so stressed driving it at first - not because it was a pig to drive or anything – I was just so paranoid I'd run out of power and not find a socket to charge the little i-MiEV up.

It's fine if you live in London - the trendy heart of green transportation. There are bikes and city cars to hire and electric sockets to plug your vehicle into all over the place. Birmingham has even got a few charging points now and, I dare say, so have some other major cities. But if, like me, you live in a fairly nondescript town somewhere in Northamptonshire then your options, aside from your electricity supply at home, are fairly limited.

Take this week. I needed to drive from Kettering (oops, I've let the cat out of the bag) to Leicester for a meeting at a radio station. Everyone clucked over the "cool looking" i-MiEV in the car park. I couldn't disagree – my test vehicle was cloaked in matt black with a cream leather interior. But what really unnerved me was the trip back home. You see, I'd stuck my foot down on the 20 mile trip there, and on the return leg my right foot was pretty heavy again. I soon lifted it off the gas (I mean electricity), when I noticed the 'fuel' gauge, or in this case the charge gauge, was down to one bar – and then, all of a sudden, it was flashing zero. Help! At this point I decided to lift my foot off the accelerator pedal. This lets the motor operate as a power generator and the car's motion energy is converted to electricity which charges the traction battery. This is known as 'regenerative braking'. The feeling is similar to the one you get when you engine

brake going through the gears in a manual 'normal' car. It's clever stuff. And it's needed. It got me home – just!

You see, the i-MiEV has only got a maximum range of 90 miles – and that's if you drive it cautiously. That's the downside if you venture too far from home without checking if there are any public charging facilities en route. If you don't tend to travel too far for a single journey this is a perfect option for you as the upside is that it has zero emissions, so you don't pay any road tax. It's also very cheap to run – obviously!

Inside, the mini Mitsubishi is surprisingly spacious and the boot is not bad either. Behind the wheel, the electric car is nippy and fun. It can handle 70 mph easily on the motorways, but around town is where it feels the best. It zips from here to there with ease, and parking the i-MiEV is a piece of cake.

At first, it takes a little bit of thought about the best gear to be in. The car has a few drive positions, you see: D (for city driving); B (for going downhill) and C (for comfortable driving). B is a good mode to be in if you live in undulating surroundings because it increases the Mitsubishi's usability on hills, and gives stronger regenerative braking than the D position.

Yes, all in all, despite the initial worry of running out of power, I enjoyed my time with the i-MiEV. It looked pretty cute sat on my drive hooked up to my garage's power socket – and, on the road, I soon got used to the eerie silence of not having an internal combustion engine under the bonnet. I can certainly say that Mitsubishi's i-MiEV is a world away from the first electric vehicle I ever clapped eyes on - the once familiar, but now increasingly rare, milk float!

Pros 'N' Cons

- Environmentally friendly
- Cheap to run
- Nippy
- Fun
- Range

Fast Facts

- Max speed: 81 mph
- 0-62 mph: 13 secs
- Engine: Electric
- Max. power (bhp): 66 at 8000 rpm
- Max. torque (lb/ft): 133 at 2000 rpm
- CO₂: 0 g/km

Price: £ 28,990 on the road