



Alfa Romeo Mito QV 2013.

A long time ago, actually a long, long time ago, I bought an Alfa. It was a 1978 GTV with a chronic oil leak and rust in just about every panel. But it sparked something in me, I'm sure many of you have had the same revelation moment. You get behind the wheel and the world is at your fingertips, few cars can transmit the road to your hands as well as a well sorted Alfa. Driving an Alfa is truly an experience. Owning one can also be an experience, sometimes they leave you much poorer for that experience, but what price feeding the soul?

So, you might say that I may have a preconceived idea about any new Alfa. It is true, I do, but contrary to the popular view of Alfas portrayed in the trash media, I don't expect the car to have rusted before it left the showroom and to break down in the forecourt on delivery, I am much more critical. An Alfa, any Alfa, should rekindle that revelation moment, it should fan the flames of your memory and make you relive that first moment of driving an Alfa.

The Mito QV appealed to me whilst on an extended trip overseas, my wife's 159 wagon was approaching the end of its lease and I was looking at a replacement vehicle for her. Naturally I started out looking at the Giulietta as a replacement family sedan. I did not expect that my wife would be so adamant in keeping her 159. I then noticed that some of the Mito QV's were quite attractively priced. One drive when back in Australia and I was convinced that I wanted one. The car is pretty much exactly what a small Alfa should be. It is light(ish) by modern standards, has a superb motor, three pedals and distinctive styling. Think of an Alfa Sud or 33, modernised and where everything works.

Now, several months down the track, how do I feel about the Mito? It is, without doubt, a blast, I have not had a problem, the fuel economy is sensational and I have only found it wanting on one occasion, which I will get into later. What follows is a review, like the car mags do it, but with an owner, someone who drives the car everyday, rather than for a week or so.

Engine: 1.4 Multiair Turbo Petrol (125kW, 170 bhp version)

The powerplant of any car is its heart and in an Alfa there is a fair amount of soul in the engine as well. The 1.4TB engine is versatile, the Multiair system of direct control over the inlet valves adds some flexibility to the power and torque delivery which other, lesser, engines cannot match. For my daily commute there is more than enough power and torque available. When I would like to drive in a more spirited fashion there is plenty of torque to get you off the mark quickly and enough power for a small car to probably get to the advertised top speed (219 kmh), or at least close enough that it makes little difference.

Fuel economy is good, I'm averaging 7.9 l/100km (35.7 mpg) for all my driving, on a long highway run the fuel consumption decreases to about 6.5 l/100 km (43.5 mpg), but around town it rarely gets to more than 9 l/100 km (31.4 mpg). The car has stop/start technology, which I don't get to use much, but it adds another bonus to the car, on which I'll elucidate later. Of course this car, like all of Alfa's current line up has the DNA (Dynamic/Normal/All-weather) switch which changes a few parameters in the car to transform the way the car handles and responds to the driver. In the QV it also engages overboost which is the way you extract those extra horses from what is essentially the same engine as in the non-QV models. Overboost is fun. There must be a price to pay for all this fun, surely. You would expect that the fuel economy would suffer, badly. Strangely this is not the case. I drove around in normal mode for a couple of weeks, a couple of tanks full of fuel I got 7.9 l/100km. So I then drove for a couple of weeks in dynamic, I got 7.9 l/100km, since then I have driven around almost exclusively in dynamic mode, except for when the roads get wet and then all-weather mode makes some sense. I'm still getting the same fuel economy.

In order to get the ample power and torque to the ground you need a transmission, the QV only comes in a six speed manual, which is exactly what I wanted anyway, so no complaints there. It's a good gearbox, with a sharp shift action and nicely spaced gear ratios. Given the flexibility of the engine it's easy to shift to a higher gear than you would normally be used to for cruising around at 80 kmh, which also contributes to a better than expected fuel economy figure.

Interior

The interior of the QV is one of the few places where options can be specified. The base model, which I have, has sports seats, finished in cloth and Alcantara (fake suede, but nice), you can specify leather. Up until recently there was also the option of carbon fibre Sabelt seats, some of the cars on the secondhand market have these, but I have been informed by a couple of dealers that Alfa won't be importing anymore cars specced with these seats, so if you want them, you may have to get them from the UK. There is also the option of the full glass sunroof, which I think looks great, but it does come at the cost of some interior

headroom, so much so, in fact that with my 6' frame, my head hits the roof even with the seat height adjustment all the way down. Hence, no sunroof for me. Alfa had already noticed this design feature, as the sunroof and Sabelt seat options weren't available together, the Sabelt seats are not height adjustable.

The remainder of the interior is pleasant enough, there's no high quality hand-crafted metal switches, but this is not a million dollar supercar, the important bits, the gear lever, steering wheel and switchgear are all good enough, nothing special, but functional. The green stitching of the QV adds a little bit of flair, but it's not overdone. The dashboard is covered in a fake carbon fibre finish, which is easy to keep clean, but does reflect a bit more sunlight than you would like. This is a problem not unique to this car though, as dashboards have become more vast as a consequence of the increased rake of windscreens to get better Euro NCAP ratings for the vehicles (it has something to do with pedestrian safety, I believe). One day someone will invent a non-reflective surface which looks nice. The dials all look nice and are very easy to read, the centre display has all your trip information, a nice boost gauge when in dynamic mode, an added bonus if you get the integrated Blue & Me TomTom navigation unit is that the directions it gives are also displayed here.

The back seats are comfortable enough for adults for a short trip but may prove a bit claustrophobic for a longer journey. The rear seats fold pretty much flat to enhance the cargo area, which adds to the versatility of this three door hatch.





Exterior

Most reasonable people would probably agree with much of the above, but where you will get some very differing opinions is on the exterior styling of the Mito. It has taken design cues from the gorgeous 8C of this there can be no doubt, particularly with the front and rear styling, so what could possibly go wrong? Well, they've taken the 8C and sort of squashed it, as the Mito is taller than an 8C as well as shorter and thinner. Some love it, some hate it, my own opinion probably doesn't matter, but I obviously don't fall into the latter category. The colour I chose is Tornado Blue, a bright metallic blue, which I particularly like, although the Maranello red is also an alluring colour choice (one which I prefer on the Giulietta though). I do like the pillarless doors, but one thing that makes them a bit hard to control is the placing of the door pull near the front of the door, where you have much less mechanical advantage. A small grab handle towards the rear of the door would be a great addition, particularly as the doors are quite large to allow for easy ingress and egress to the rear seats. The fake carbon fibre is repeated in the door linings. There are mounting points for roof racks built into the roof (the version with a sunroof has a special roof rack system to allow for the roof to slide back). The QV comes standard with rear parking sensors, which are a must as rear visibility is limited. The wheels on the QV are a nice departure from the traditional all silver alloy rims.





Gadgets

Modern vehicles have to have all sorts of gadgets, it's a given. More TLAs (Three Letter Acronyms) than you can poke a stick at. Let's have a look at what the Mito QV has; VDC with Hill Holder, ABS with ASR and EBD, DNA, Q2 Electronic Differential, Traction Control, Auto Wipers, Auto Dipping Internal Rearview Mirror, Auto on Headlights, Follow Me Home Headlights and a lot of airbags. Quite a list of gadgetry, do you notice any of it? I do like the auto on (and off) headlights, the auto wipers are much better behaved than those of the 156 or 159, the ABS and traction control aren't so intrusive, the hill holder function takes some getting used to, the auto dipping rearview mirror is excellent, I hope not to try out the airbags. Basically, all these things add to the driving experience, they make it easier to drive the car, but they don't unnecessarily impinge on the driver's style (or lack thereof), all positive so far.

Blue & Me has been the butt of many jokes, I suppose anyone who has used a Windows based computer shudders when they see that little sticker in the car that lets you know it's powered by Microsoft. The first versions of this were somewhat underwhelming, but like many technologies, it is maturing and is now at the stage where it is useful. Like many things Microsoft, the interface and implementation could be much better, but the basic functions are useable. I just wonder how much better it would be if the boys at Cupertino got their hands on it? I don't like where the USB port is, in many cars it is hidden away in some neat little iPhone shaped compartment, but in the Mito it is placed in the centre console underneath the gearshift. I use an iPod in my car, which fits nicely in the centre armrest, but I have the USB lead running out of this and into the USB port of the car. One day I'll probably shift it to inside the armrest, where it should have been in the first place. At least iPod and iPhone connectivity is sorted out and as good as any other moderately priced head unit on the market. B&M does

integrate with the navigation unit to provide a graphical representation of some car statistics and the trip meters.

Alfa (or rather Fiat) have partnered TomTom to produce a nicely integrated navigation unit. It plugs into a port on the top of the dashboard, which also holds the unit's mount, it looks relatively neat and certainly better than the stick it to the window type mount. Because it is positioned below the rearview mirror the information comes easy to the eye. All up one of the better optional navigation unit implementations that I have seen. These are available from the dealers as an option, though I picked mine up from eBay quite cheaply.



The car also has the stop/start technology, which will cut the engine if you are stationary, out of gear and have the clutch released. It restarts after a couple of minutes to restart the climate control, then will run for a few minutes then stop again. I rarely use this, but do so on some occasions, it must reduce the fuel consumption, but not much in a manual car as I tend to stop at traffic lights with the car in gear and clutch depressed. The unforeseen advantage of the stop/start technology is when you are teaching your daughter how to drive a manual car. Whenever she stalled the car (not so much after a while), she simply depressed the clutch again the car started, so much better than the slightly panicked reach for the key to restart the car.

Overall

The Mito QV has been a bit of a departure for me, for the first time in many years I have moved to a smaller vehicle. The utility of the vehicle has been tested on a couple of occasions. It has, so far, only failed me once, when trying to transport a rather large telescope. I was hoping the optical tube assembly would fit into the front seat area (mainly so I could use the seatbelt to hold it in place), but I couldn't get it to fit. Now that I have had the car (and telescope) for a few months, I have worked out how to fit it all, there's even room in the front seat!





Other than that one time, the Mito has been great. The fuel economy is sensational, it has enough power and torque to make driving fun and the functionality is not severely hampered by the small nature of the car. The interior is a nice place to be and it looks stunning.