



A race driver who has driven the Evo IX MR in Super Endurance and other races give us his impression of the new Lancer Evo X.

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Racing driver and motor journalist

He began driving as a professional in 1985, and is a former Japan F3 champion. In recent years, he has won the Super Endurance Class five times driving Lancer Evolutions, and is currently rewriting the record book for most class wins. As well as serving as a member of the Japan Car of the Year selection panel, he also devotes much energy to theoretical analysis of vehicle behavioral characteristics.



What evolutionary steps would you say Evolution X has taken?

Well, to begin with, it's a totally different machine to drive. The Twin Clutch SST makes it really easy to drive. But I'm not saying that it ruins things for those who enjoy shifting manually for sport driving pleasure. In the world of motorsports, a major requirement is how to achieve maximum steering accuracy while putting minimum strain on the driver. That is because as speeds increase, the driver wants to concentrate all his mental and physical energies on controlling the machine. In this sense, Evo X allows the driver to concentrate more on steering without having to worry about operating the clutch. And this leads to a new kind of driving pleasure.



What would you say were the distinguishing features of the Twin Clutch SST?

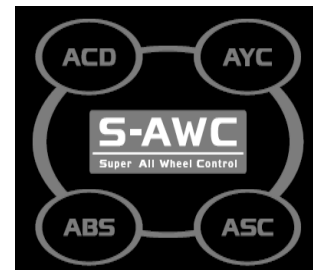
The 2-pedal automated manual gearbox is becoming a common feature in high-performance cars. BMW makes one, but because it uses a single clutch the clutch disengages for a moment and then re-engages when shifting, which produces shift jolt. The SST uses two clutches, and this virtually eliminates all shift jolt and allows lightning-quick shifting. VW does have a twin clutch SST but I can't think of any turbocharged models fitted with it that produce as much power as the Evo X. In addition, when the VW transmission shifts it produces what called a shift lock, and it affects the behavior of the vehicle. You can prevent this by using heel-and-toe double declutching to match engine speed to the gearbox input shaft speed. But the Twin Clutch SST allows drivers who can't heel and toe to shift really smoothly. The Twin Clutch SST uses highly specialized and advanced control technology that stops the transmission from shifting up the moment the driver takes his foot off the accelerator, shifting down as soon as he depresses the accelerator pedal or operating in other ways that he doesn't want it to. For me, the Twin Clutch SST delivers the kind of power transmission characteristics that are very close to what I would consider ideal.





What about Evo X's vehicle dynamics, one of your specialist areas?

The addition of brake force control to the new S-AWC system really makes a huge difference. Each wheel has its own brake and there are times when I'd actually like to have four pedals so that I could apply just a particular brake for maximum steering control without affecting traction when I'm cornering. Evo X's S-AWC does this for you automatically using electronic control technology. Leaving everything to S-AWC allows less skilled drivers to drive really fast. But S-AWC goes even further by allowing the more skillful driver to utilize the benefits of its advanced electronic control technology to drive faster still. Another feature worthy of notice is the Active Stability Control function, which very effectively exploits the system's various technologies to enhance vehicle safety.



What about Evo X's all-new bodywork?

One of the quickest ways of raising a car's performance level is to use larger tires. The tires provide the only point of contact between the vehicle and the road surface, and thus larger tires mean a bigger contact patch. But it is vital that the body have the required rigidity if the suspension is to keep those tires firmly in contact with the surface. Increasing structural rigidity normally increases weight which impacts the car's dynamic performance and fuel economy. But with Evo X the bodywork changes have been masterfully implemented and work to enhance the car's road performance.



Is there anything else you noticed?

Evo X comes with two-piece floating disc brakes (part of a factory-fitted package option). Under heavy braking, the brakes are producing a lot of heat, and this is transmitted to the wheel hub and can affect durability. This isn't a problem with the floating disc brake because it doesn't transmit so much heat. I had no brake trouble at all when I drove my Lancer in the Tokachi 24-hour endurance race. There are very few Japanese domestic market models that use this type of brake. And with Bilstein shocks and Eibach springs, the development team has really gone to town in areas hidden from the eye!



Finally, what about Evo X's new engine?

Evo X is powered by a new 2.0-liter engine that generates more torque than its predecessor. But the thing that really surprised me is that the use of an aluminum cylinder block cuts the weight of the engine itself by 12 kg. And putting the battery in the trunk is another feature that merits attention both from a technological and a cost viewpoint. The result of these changes is a significant improvement in front/rear weight distribution. Numerically it's only about a 2% improvement, but that is pretty significant in a car that weighs over 1.5 tons. Evo X actually comes with a larger body but you wouldn't know it from the way it handles. And since the Twin Clutch SST allows you to concentrate more on actually driving and handling the car, I hope more people will buy it to enter rallies and dirt races.

