



There is more than one Evolution

Words and photography by John Denny

As a long time E36 M3 owner, I had often thought what other car could match the M for speed, performance, and that although not a new car would still have that cool factor, plus the fact that all my friends thought having the same style car for 11 years was a bit dull, and may require some sessions with a therapist.

The two main cars that always fitted the bill were the Subaru Impreza and the Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution VI. After trying a '96 Impreza STI, I found the level of trim to be sub-standard, the general feel was poor, the whole interior was full of plastic, and the fit wasn't great, and other than the sports seats and Momo steering wheel the interior was very bland.

The car itself drove well, but I couldn't live with the low trim level, so it was on to my second choice, the EVO VI. In comparison it had a better level of trim than the Subaru, the Recaro seats were firm but comfortable, and the general layout of the interior was very good for a Japanese car. The rear spoiler was a bit of an overkill, but hey that's what makes the car look more like a rally car than a family saloon car,

on which the car is based so it's something you grow to appreciate.

So decision made, I sold my 98 M3 Evo Coupé, and purchased a low mileage 98 EVO VI with full Mitsubishi service history and though an import, it had been in the country for a long time, and its previous owner had it for a good length of time too so I thought it was the best I had seen for the money. It had some subtle mods, a stainless steel exhaust, HKS intake kit, and a blitz blow off valve, but other than that it was completely standard (no bolt on dials and dvd screens etc).

I collected the car from just off the M25, and proceeded to drive it home to sunny Chester, and the first thing I noticed was how much torque the car had pulling through the gears, the 4 x 4 system really puts the power down well. The induction and blow off valve noise at first were fun, then after a few miles they became a little annoying, though when the car delivered the power you got a big grin on your face, so it was an acceptable by-product. The main issue I noticed on my first run home, was the fuel economy, when cruising over 75 mph, the turbo was just spooling up and you could almost see the fuel gauge going down, this was big shock compared to my old M that would deliver 35 to the gallon at the same speed. The other thing you notice with the EVO VI is how stiff the standard suspension is, it's great when motoring round the A roads and dual carriageways, but not when your

driving on bumpy B roads or around town over speed humps. My Mrs was not a fan, and was constantly complaining and having to support her assets :0).

The small petrol tank and low mph made for a bad match as I was always at the petrol station filling up, as I got around 200 miles per fill-up, as opposed to 300 in the M, based on my driving style, not a scientific test!

Power delivery in the EVO VI was punchy, but the short range of the 2.0 litre Turbo compared to the long range of the 3.2 of the M3 meant I had to totally change my driving style, as you find you are always changing gear to get the best out of the turbo. The gearbox was also very notchy when cold, which is a personal bugbear of mine, for having lots of Ms that have had worn 2nd gear syncros. After driving around in the EVO VI for a few weeks, I came to the conclusion that putting the HKS intake and blow off valve back to standard may make the car easier to live with, because it was a bit "look at me" every time you changed gear. I was fortunate enough to have the standard parts, so set about the job and 2 hours later, one standard EVO sat in front of me. Though a quieter car and easier to live with, the fun had gone, maybe it was a psychological thing but the car seem a lot slower, and you didn't want to drive it as hard anymore, it was still as stiff as a board mind!

Once the novelty had worn off, and you find yourself driving the car in normal traffic, the commute to work, and round town etc, the bland interior and stiff ride began to take its toll, and I found myself longing for another BMW. So only 6 weeks after buying the EVO it was back on eBay, to quickly be replaced by a 535i Sport, that was then swapped for another M3 EVO.

The two cars are very similar on paper, they are similar in size, similar in power, they both seat 5 people, have a big boot space, and can be driven on the road, and still be used at the weekend for a track day toy if you so wish. The main difference I found was that though having similar power, the way the M3 delivers it makes for a better driving experience, as the engine pulls like a train, and you don't have to change gear all the time on normal driving runs to take advantage of

the power. With the M3 being the heavier car its soaks up the road well compared to the EVO VI, though the RWD of the M makes it more slightly more unstable than the AWD of the EVO when pushing hard, it still for me is a more controllable car, as you control what the car is doing rather than relying on the clever suspension that the EVO VI uses, like the active yaw control etc.

In conclusion, had I got into an EVO VI before I learnt my driving styling in powerful rear wheel drive cars like M3s and 911s maybe I would have been hooked on the 4x4 rally replicas like the Subaru and the EVOs but in my opinion, the larger engine, heavier German sports saloons are the way to go, they have higher level of interior trim, they are smoother to drive on the day-to-day runs, they have a that cache of being just that little bit more exclusive, but still deliver the sports experience when you open up the throttle and unleash the horses that lie dormant for most of time under the bonnet. They are real 'Wolfs in sheep's clothing'. I enjoyed the brief ownership of the EVO VI, and unless you've had one I don't believe you can discount them as a viable car choice, but I must say the M3 quickly found its way back on the drive, it may be slightly slower than the EVO, but I would say it's a much better all round car.

I'm glad I tried the smaller engine turbo experience for the EVO VI, as it has cemented the fact that I prefer the bigger engine performance that I feel the M3 gives you. The only outstanding question that remains is how would the Nissan Skyline R33 GTRs 2.5, 6 cylinder twin turbo stack up, being a blend of big engine and assisted breathing, though still the interior is lacking, maybe another for the future? Who knows!

Model	M3 Evo Coupé	Model	Mitsubishi EVO VI
Transmission	6-Speed manual/6 Speed SMG (RWD)	Transmission	5-speed manual (AWD)
Wheelbase	2,710 mm (106.6 in)	Wheelbase	2,510 mm (98.8 in)
Length	4,433 mm (174.5 in)	Length	4,350 mm (171.3 in)
Width	1,710 mm (67.3 in)	Width	1,770 mm (69.7 in)
Height	1,335–1,365 mm (52.6–53.7 in)	Height	1,405–1,415 mm (55.3–55.7 in)
Curb weight	1,535 kg (3384 lb)	Curb weight	1,250–1,360 kg (2,756–2,998 lb)
Engine	3201cc / 6 Cylinder / 24 Valve	Engine	1997cc / 4 Cylinder / 16 Valve
Power Output	321 BHP	Power Output	280 BHP
Torque	258.11 lbs/ft / 350 Nm @ 3250 Rpm	Torque	275 lbs/ft / 372.43 @ 3000 Rpm
0 - 62	5.5 Seconds	0 - 60	4.4 Seconds
Top Speed	155 Mph	Top Speed	150 Mph
(Source Owners Handbook)		(Source: Internet)	

