

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

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EVENTS : ARIZONA AUCTIONS • FISHER CRAFTMAN'S GUILD
• DETROIT AUTO SHOW • CHICAGO AUTO SHOW
VEHICLES : AUDI • BMW • FORD • INFINITI • KIA
• LEXUS • SUBARU • TOYOTA • VOLVO



2014
Subaru
Forester
2.0XT
Turbo



Fine for the forest, desert or ...track!

Counterintuitive or not, the company behind the hot tuner fave WRX STI shows off their potent turbocharged version of this popular midsize utility.

By Joe Sage

Subaru introduced the compact crossover Forester in the late 1990s (1997 in Japan, 1998 in the US), pitting it against the biggest of the big SUVs that roamed our roads at that time. The same buyers who valued Subaru as a source for non-nonsense, high-mileage, all-conditions-capable wagons and sedans found much to like in this small but useful machine—what Subaru calls “SUV tough but car easy,” and considered by them to be the first crossover (though other brands consider themselves the same). Sales grew from about 15,000 the first year to about 60,000 by 2002.

Sales of the second generation, from 2003-2007, tapered off and ultimately dipped to 45,000.

In its third generation, the Forester was bumped up a bit in size, while other utilities started to migrate down. This model contributed to very good years for Subaru, which has had five years of growth, four years of record sales, and a record 336,000 units sold in 2012. Directly applicable to Arizona, Subaru’s market share in sunbelt states increased almost 20 percent over that span.

Subaru leads the industry for brand loyalty, with a 71 percent customer retention rate. And their drawing power continues to grow: 60 percent of last year’s customers were new to the brand.

We headed to Tucson, to see what was new for the coming year: the fourth-generation 2014 Subaru Forester.

GETTING TO THIS POINT

Following the best-selling third generation of the Forester, Subaru has been motivated to make the vehicle even better for 2014. The mission assigned to the development team was comprehensive: the new Forester must exceed at safety standards and must do well off-road, on-road, climbing and descending, and on the track—all of the above in dirt, deep water, snow, ice or slush.

Customers rate the Forester high for adventure, versatility, longevity (expecting as much as 300,000 miles from their vehicle) and safety. For 2014, Subaru seeks to deliver more styling presence and better packaging, more daily usability on highways and around town, better fuel economy, improved environmental impact, more ease of use and general enjoyment, and a higher level of differentiation specifically for the turbo—now becoming a separate performance model, not just an engine option. Lest you think this might run up the cost, the team was also told to deliver the best value SUV in its class.

GETTING TO THE NEXT POINT

To help fulfill these duties, the 2014 Forester receives a new CVT (continuously variable transmission)—standard on two top 2.5i models and both 2.0XT models, though optional against a 6-speed manual on two lower 2.5i models. And it gets a new 2.0-liter high-torque turbocharged engine for the 2.0XT model. Subaru emphasizes that the new turbo is a dramatically reengineered model, “not a bolt-on power unit.” The turbo model can

KEEP RIGHT >>



Photo: Inde Motorsports Ranch



The 250-hp 2.0XT turbocharged engine above powered us for hot laps at Inde Motorsports Ranch, a 2.75-mile, 21-turn private racetrack outside Willcox. The boxer engine’s low profile contributes to superb high-speed handling. The 170-hp normally-aspirated 2.5i boxer (below) was no slouch, either, burning up the gravel on North Cascabal Road from Pomerene north to San Manuel, Arizona.





Dominick Infante, national manager of product communications, demonstrates how the new 2014 Subaru Forester can gobble up cargo, whether it be a palette-load of yoga mats or an ungainly antique wagon wheel. The attractive and well-arranged cockpit of the Forester is a great place to challenge the CVT-paired Active AWD system with Hill Descent Control and X-Mode braking control, in the attention-focusing conditions seen below. At bottom, Subaru's engineering and development team from Japan join us near Redfield Canyon, on the road between Pomerene and San Manuel, to see the fruits of their efforts, under power on gravel.



be visually distinguished by front and rear fascias (but no hood scoop), 18-inch wheels, and upgraded headlamps and exhaust. The turbo also sports upgraded brakes and SI Drive control with Intelligent, Sport and Sport# ("Sport Sharp") settings, operated by steering wheel controls.

Both engines retain the Subaru (and Porsche) standard: an opposing-cylinder boxer format, low and stable.

The Forester has grown again: the wheelbase is an inch longer, and overall the vehicle adds an inch and a half. It's half an inch wider and 1.4 inches taller. Its overall profile is similar to that of its predecessor—you won't have any trouble recognizing the vehicle—but aerodynamics are enhanced, creating slightly more of a teardrop shape (and an 11 percent improvement in Cd, which they state beats RAV4, CR-V and CX-5 while maintaining SUV style and cargo volume).

The increased dimensions add elbow and visual room inside: occupants are farther apart and sit up higher. The instrument panel moves some functions into an upper area, attractive and with an intuitive operating flow.

Rear seating is particularly improved, with the console moved forward almost four inches, the driveshaft tunnel dropped 2.6 inches, almost an inch of foot room added below the front seats, and front seatbacks scalloped to create more rear legroom. Rear door angles and anti-slip doorsills—as well as improved child seat tethers—make the Forester more kid-friendly than ever. New cupholders are round instead of square (Subaru laughs at this overdue breakthrough), with ones in back that a kid in a child seat can reach.

Mom and dad benefit, too, as the A-pillar base is moved a full eight inches forward (with side mirrors moved to the doors), the front doors are five inches wider, and the door sill is an inch closer to the ground, all improving ingress and egress.

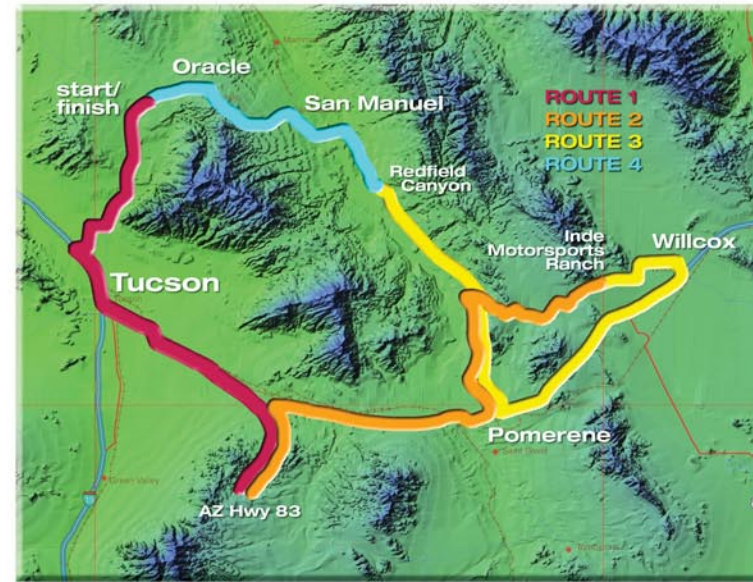
None of this new passenger space is at the expense of utility: cargo volume is also up by nine percent. The cargo area is now accessible by power liftgate, with its control in the strut, not in a fat D-pillar, also maximizing space. The power liftgate also has memory positions, so you can set a height that would work for Martina McBride. Manual efforts can override the power any time you prefer, such as for a quick close in a downpour.

THE FULL PACKAGE

Subaru's VDC (Vehicle Dynamics Control) electronic stability system enhances familiar hands-on driver duties, controlling all-wheel-drive steering, yaw and transverse power split for better traction and faster adaptation in low friction situations and in curves.

The combination of Subaru's CVT, which is installed in the majority of new Foresters, with VDC and braking systems, provides the foundation for an X-Mode system. X-Mode, "with one flick of the switch," lets you descend extremely steep grades at slow speeds. You concentrate on your path and steering, while the Forester lowers your gears, fine-feathers the accelerator and handles the brakes—all specific to the type of surface you are tackling, including extra slippery or high-friction gravel. We gave X-Mode a maximized test on an artificial surface (see photos), pushing the limits of steepness. An 8.7-inch ground clearance enhances these capabilities.

Subaru's EyeSight® Driver Assist system of pre-collision, lane departure, adaptive cruise and other features



migrates this year to Forester, from Legacy and Outback (see our Legacy review, also in this issue).

All those challenging maneuvers are things that not every owner does every day, so to enhance regular life, Subaru has added a new multi-function color display, which controls a Harman Kardon 440-watt 8-speaker premium audio system with metal cone speakers, including 6x9 front door woofers (there is no subwoofer, to maintain maximum utility space). Phone and infotainment functions utilize your existing smartphone, so you can continue a conversation as you leave your Forester.

The Forester's enhanced efficiencies, despite its larger size—all of which actually only adds 24 pounds—add up to class-leading fuel economy. The highest numbers are delivered by the naturally-aspirated 2.5i engine with CVT (see sidebar), which beats all challengers with AWD (though a front-drive Ford Escape or front-drive Mazda CX-5 challenge a couple of specifics, e.g. the CX-5 has a higher city mileage but via a half-liter smaller engine).

Green credentials come from these fuel mileage ratings, from PZEV emissions ratings, and from Subaru's proud achievement of a zero-landfill assembly plant.

The Forester is quicker this year, with 0-to-60 acceleration of about 9 seconds in the 2.5i, which beats the old model and most competition. The 2.0XT turbo hits 60 in 6.2 seconds (a V6 Porsche Cayenne does 6.1), while getting 28 MPG highway. Electric power steering

helps fuel economy and didn't interfere with our driving enjoyment. Four-wheel disc brakes are retuned and enhanced. Suspension has the same layout as in the past but with a rebound spring brought over from the Impreza, for faster cornering and quicker turn-in. The rear subframe is stronger—even moreso on the 2.0XT turbo model—as are the upper A-arms, for better ride and handling. Stiffened suspension mounts and rear liftgate opening contribute to improved NVH (noise, vibration, harshness) figures and an overall body rigidity 50 percent higher than in the previous Forester.

YOUR NEW FORESTER

Subaru expects the second-from-base 2.5i Premium model to account for 45 percent of Forester sales, with the turbo accounting for 5 percent. It's a price-conscious brand, and it's a fuel economy-conscious brand. We did have as much fun driving the 2.5i at speed, on gravel, from Pomerene up to San Manuel, as we did driving the 2.0XT at higher speed on the racetrack at Inde Motorsports Ranch—each in its own particular way.

You do owe it to yourself to drive the turbo before you buy. After all, its starting price (see sidebar) is lower than the highest 2.5i price, and fuel economy ultimately depends upon your own driving style—which, if you are intrigued by the idea of the turbo, just might be a little heavy-footed on the 2.5i's pedal, anyway. ■

The Subaru Forester 2.0XT turbo at the front of the line (above) is quickly distinguishable from its 2.5i sibling (second in line) by prominent air intakes in the lower front fascia.

2014 SUBARU FORESTER

2.5i : base, Premium, Limited, Touring

HP / TORQUE170 hp / 174 lb-ft

TRANSMISSION¹6-speed

MPG (EST)¹22/29/24 (city/hwy/comb)

AWD¹: Continuous with viscous-coupling locking center diff, split 50:50 front/rear.

TRANSMISSION²CVT

MPG (EST)²24/32/27 (city/hwy/comb)

AWD²: Active Torque Split AWD with electronically managed continuously variable transfer clutch managing power split based on accel, decel, traction.

BASE PRICE\$21,995-29,995

2.0XT : Premium, Touring

HP / TORQUE170 hp / 174 lb-ft

TRANSMISSION²All have CVT

AWD²: Active Torque Split as above.

MPG (EST)23/28/25 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE\$27,995-32,995

