

# Loyalty has its rewards

by Joe Sage

We've seen manufacturers develop sales based at least in part on value, only to look for every opportunity to nudge pricing uphill as soon as they sense growing popularity. Subaru has the most loyal word-of-mouth customers in the business. One look at the price on this next-to-top-trim Forester and all its inclusions (sidebar), and you will see they remain equally loyal in return.

Though you will recognize it immediately, this is a brand new Subaru Forester. The new fifth-generation Forester (actually introduced over a year ago at the 2018 New York auto show) is built atop the new Subaru Global Platform, after years of being built atop the Impreza platform. Since the Impreza was already the first to move to the Global Platform, this is not a philosophical change for Forester, and it provides benefits—better handling, a quieter cabin, higher safety standards, and room.

The new model is about an inch longer, wider and taller, and cargo volume is increased by about one and a half to almost two cubic feet. It has a larger fuel tank, on top of also now getting higher fuel mileage (and this despite being a little heavier). That's not the only win-win: despite being a little bigger, the new Forester has higher approach, breakover and departure angles, while retaining its bragworthy 8.7-inch ground clearance,

all enhancing its off-pavement capabilities. Tow capacity remains the same, at 1500 lb.

There are five trim levels, of which our Limited is next-to-top. All now have Active Torque Vectoring, Apple/Android, and Starlink apps. All except the base model include a power sliding moonroof. Yet with all these add-ons, the new models run just \$500 more than the prior year, with a base Forester starting at just \$24,295. That's loyalty to you.

Forester is not the sexiest SUV or crossover, but it gets the job done and doesn't blow the budget. It's a good provider. Long-term relationship material. And in a world where 60 percent of its competitors look almost exactly the same, we could even take that as a plus. We have a hunch its satisfied owners do. (And an available Sport model, with black grille and foglight surrounds and some tasteful red highlights, is actually moderately sexy.)

We had a lot of long voice memos on this one, often not a good sign, as we may be nitpicking and dig-dig-digging through manuals. On the Forester, it was a good sign, by and large. We were indeed digging, as quite a few of the Subaru's features are set up in ways that differ from almost everybody else. "It's what makes a Subaru a Subaru," as they say. Having dug, though, we found an impressive range of features well implemented, especially for the price. We only have these for a few days, but any owner will actually enjoy learning all this vehicle's tricks. You'll spend a bit of time getting oriented, but pretty quickly you will have

made everything your own, quirky or not, and that's all in line with the spirit of the brand.

Any nitpicks? While the upper display screen atop the dash is extremely well shielded from sunlight, the main screen is not shielded at all, though its surface didn't really have significant glare.

The CVT (continuously variable transmission) is a feature most colleagues profess to hate. We're not nuts about them, either, but we're convinced most owners will never know or care that they have one, or if they do know they won't care. Power feels good in this one, and Lineartronic faux shifts keep pace, though we might have wished for the up/down shift capability of a manual at times. The intelligent and sport modes of SI-Drive can be used to optimize these characteristics quite a bit. (There is no manual available in any trim.)

Its auto start-stop and lane-keeping features are aggressive and hard to defeat for long, and its pre-collision braking gave us one full panic stop over someone waiting to turn from a different lane.

Though not an intense off-roader, Forester benefits from X-Drive's modes for dirt, snow and mud.

Forester has the overall image of an SUV (which is how Subaru categorizes it, although they also put Crosstrek and Outback in this group, as well as of course Ascent), but its greenhouse height doesn't weigh much or raise its center of gravity all that dramatically. At 182 hp, it may not be a rally car, but it does have rally cars in the family, and it delivers a spirited drive when pushed.

The base trim Forester starts at \$24,295, with a top trim Touring at \$34,295. The engine and fuel mileage are the same on all models; EyeSight driver assist is included on all, as is some form of Starlink multimedia; a moonroof is on all but the bottom trim, while leather is on the top two trims; tow capacity, AWD, X-Mode and hill descent are the same on all. If you want to go all out, you'll find a favorable price walk to the top. If you want to economize, you'll find a favorable feature set at every level. When it comes to value, you'll find Subaru very much still has its eye on the ball. ■

## SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	.....2.5L 4-cyl DOHC 16v boxer, alum block/heads
DRIVETRAIN	.....Symmetrical AWD
HP/TORQUE	.....182 hp / 176 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	.....Lineartronic CVT; dual-mode X-Mode (Snow/Dirt, Deep Snow/Mud); hill descent
SUSPENSION	.....4-whl indep F: MacPherson struts, lower L-arms, coils, stblzr bar; R: dbl wishbn, coils, stblzr bar
STEERING	.....elec power assist rack & pinion
BRAKES	.....pwr assist 4-whl disc, EBD, actv torque vector
WHEELS	.....18" machine finish black alloys
TIRES	.....225/55R18 98H all season
LENGTH / WB	.....182.1 / 105.1 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....8.7 in
APPROACH/BRKVR/DEPART	.....22.9° / 19.6° / 24.6°
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....(w/moonroof) 40.2 / 37.7 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....43.3 / 39.4 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....(w/moonroof) 33.0 / 70.9 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....3541 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....regular unl / 16.6 gal
MPG	.....26/33/29 (city/hwy/comb)

**LIMITED INCL:** blind spot; rear cross traffic; dual-mode X-mode w hill descent, 18" alloys in black w machine finish; all-weather package (heated front seats, heated mirrors, wiper de-icer); auto up/down front windows; auto LED heads w height adjustment control; high beam assist; steering responsive headlights; color LCD combo meter; dual USB in rear console; dark tint glass; foldable mirrors w turn indicators; fogs with chrome trim; wifi hotspot (monthly cost); keyless entry/start; perforated leather upholstery; leather shift handle; color LCD multifunction display; power moonroof; power rear gate w auto close & height memory; rear AC outlets; voice-act dual-zone auto climate; body color rear roof spoiler; black roof rails; black underguards on front, rear, sides.

BASE PRICE	.....\$30,795
OPTION PACKAGE	.....1695
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subaru Starlink 8-in high-res touchscreen multimedia navigation system; AM-FM-CD; Apple/Android, Starlink cloud apps; SiriusXM all-access radio, traffic, travel link; Bluetooth phone, text, audio streaming; voice-activated controls; TomTom voice-activated nav; near field communication (NFC)</li> <li>• Harman Kardon 576-watt equiv 9-sprkr premium audio</li> <li>• Reverse automatic braking;</li> <li>• Heated steering wheel</li> </ul>	
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....975
TOTAL	.....\$33,465

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