

Hey, good-lookin'!

BY JOE SAGE

There has been a boom in this niche lately—lively compact crossovers tending toward the wagon or hatchback scale of things, with a light degree of ruggedness built into their formula, as well. But this is the one that wrote the book: the Subaru Crosstrek, combining the smaller size of the Impreza (along with WRX and Forester) with the utility of the Legacy (and Outback), while bearing a personality all its own. And though it looks familiar, it's all new in generation three for 2024.

Introduced to the US last winter at the Chicago Auto Show, the new Crosstrek carries forward its same two engines, but drops the availability of a manual transmission. It of course remains all-wheel-drive, as do all Subaru models except the Toyota-shared BRZ rear-drive sports car (and with a note that a front-drive Crosstrek was introduced

in Japan for this generation).

Reengineering includes a 10 percent stiffer chassis, which enhances performance dynamics and general ride quality, with the model receiving additional upgrades to its display and controls, driver assist features and communications connectivity.

While bearing an active outdoorsy personality of its own, last spring Subaru Crosstrek received a Wilderness build—following suit to Outback and now also Forester—featuring upgraded suspension and larger wheels and tires (bringing ground clearance to a healthy 9.3 inches), along with various style points.

The entire five-trim range retains its incredible value, running from \$24,995 to \$31,995. Our Limited, at \$30,895, now sits in next-to-top position with the arrival of Wilderness. The first two have

a 152-horsepower 2.0-liter 4-cylinder boxer engine (another Subaru hallmark); the upper three a 182-hp 2.5-liter. Fuel mileage drops by only one point—from 27/34 mpg city/highway in the 2.0L to 26/33 in the 2.5L (In the beefy-tired Wilderness, highway mileage drops another four points). Beyond what seems like a small horsepower difference, the bigger 2.5-liter engine also has a tow capacity of 3500 pounds, versus 1500 for the 2.0-liter. All but the most specifically budget-driven buyers are likely to favor the 2.5-liter trims.

But the biggest news for gen three is surely its restyling. Such efforts can be radical or they can be subtle, but to be successful, they will be glorious in their own right, while losing no brand or model identity, and while keeping the prior version looking solid, just as good for what it was as the new one is for what it is now. The main defining change for 2024 is a new grille, with accompanying headlight treatment and evolution of the ele-

ments that connect it all. The grille has grown larger throughout the Subaru lineup, very welcome when you see old and new side by side. But on the Crosstrek, it receives a quite clever treatment, both visually and technically—a burly, three-dimensional character that impacts its frame slightly. Net result: the Crosstrek looks handsome and strong. It will make you smile upon approach and look over your shoulder as you walk away, more than any before. On top of all its other positive attributes, and with complete continuity from its prior generation, its looks have been transformed.

Subaru's boxer engines (with opposing cylinders, like a Porsche 911) are always smooth and strong. The one here moves right along, with power sufficient to its mission (including its high fuel mileage)peppy even, but with not a lot in reserve. Accelerating up a freeway ramp, you'll keep up just fine, but are unlikely to grab the other lane to try to pass. Auto start-stop could be very noticeable, so we turned it off (the switch is conveniently located). The transmission is a CVT, which some people actively dislike while others never even

notice. We tend to think most are the latter, but this one did make itself known to us, via its sound and its feel, at pretty much all times. Using the manumatic conquers this well, though better on upshifts than down. But this is paddles-only, with no controller on the shift lever, making it difficult to carry through with this method during turns.

(For theoretical alternative logic, see sidebar.)

All in all, we fell for the new Crosstrek in a pretty big way. Subaru has one of the highest loyalty rates in the business, so you can bet that a whole lot of people are already going to know they want it, and we're here to tell them they are going to love it. For others who are looking at alternatives, too—a set that is quite large, depending what you count, as it can get quite apple'n'orangey—anything with a real transmission is likely to have an edge. But only if this is something you notice, and again, we're convinced many people do not care.

Most of all, with only subtle styling evolution, this still instantly recognizable vehicle, with its personality and purpose fully intact, has been transformed into being masterfully good-lookin'. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Lafayette, Indiana
CONTENT	.....5% US/Canada / 85% Japan
ENGINE/TRANSMISSION	.....Japan / Japan
ENGINE	.....2.5L boxer 4-cyl, 16v DOHC, dir inject, DAVCS, alum/alum
HP/TORQUE	.....182 hp / 178 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....12.0:1
TRANSMISSION	.....Lineartronic CVT w incline start assist, dual-function X-Mode w Snow/Dirt & Deep Snow modes
DRIVETRAIN	.....ACT-4 active torque split AWD
SUSPENSION	.....4-wheel indep, raised: F: MacPherson-type struts, lower L arms, coils, dampers, stblzr bar, hydraulic engine mounts; R: dbl wishbone, coils, dampers, stblzr bar
STEERING	.....dual-pinion elec pwr asst rack & pinion
BRAKES	.....F: 12.4 vented w dual-piston; R: 11.2 vented w single-piston
WHEELS	.....18x7 alum alloy
TIRES	.....225/55 R18 98V a/s
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....176.4 / 105.1 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....8.7 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....35.44 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....(w moonrf) 38.7 / 38.0 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....42.9 / 36.5 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....19.9 / 54.7 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....3349 lb
TOW CAPACITY	.....3500 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....regular unl / 16.6
MPG	.....26/33/29 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....\$30,895
PAINT: Crystal White Pearl	.....na
OPTION PKG 33: power moonroof, Harman Kardon audio speaker system, Subaru Starlink 11.6" multimedia nav	.....2445
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1295
TOTAL	.....\$34,635

2024 SUBARU CROSSTREK LINEUP

Base	.....2.0L	.....\$24,995
Premium	....."	.....26,145
Sport	.....2.5L	.....28,995
Limited	....."	.....▼ 30,895
Wilderness	....."	.....31,995

If you crave more power, you may find yourself looking at the larger Outback as an alternative. Its lineup runs from about \$4,000 higher base to about \$8,000 higher at the top end. Most bear the same engine as our top-end Crosstrek, but the Outback range moves to a 260-hp turbo at its top end. (Outbacks also all have a CVT). The Outback also has more cargo volume, though lower fuel mileage by several points. But comparative logic quickly takes us full circle. If only the Outback existed, many buyers might be dreaming, conversely, of something a little smaller, with better fuel mileage, for thousands less. And they would invent exactly the answer we already have right here—the Crosstrek.