



Subaru Forester (2005 - 2008)

Touched up, fine-tuned and upgraded

Car review | Correspondents often have a perplexed reaction. They ask for advice on the choice for an SUV and provide a list of candidates. Autozine's answer is almost always the same: instead of choosing the obvious candidate, the advice is to consider a Subaru Forester. Why? Read it yourself, now that our favourite SUV has been improved for model year 2006.

Most SUV's never go off-road. The 4-wheel drive is hardly ever used. That is why in the meantime a lot of "look alike" have appeared on the market. They look sturdy and robust but are in fact no better in rough terrain than the average passenger car. More importantly: except for the extra space such a car only has disadvantages such as a moderate road holding and a sky-high purchase price and mileage cost. The Subaru Forester is a mixture of SUV and estate car and therefore offers the best of both worlds. The Subaru is at least as spacious as an SUV but is less high. This almost automatically means better road holding qualities and a better fuel consumption.



The occasion for this test is the new version for the model year 2006. The concept has remained the same but the car has been reviewed on all points and where possible refined. The changes to the exterior however are minimal. Only with an old Forester next to the new one the difference becomes obvious. It turns out that the headlights, the headlight washers, grille, exterior mirrors, front bumper and spotlamps have all

changed.

Interior

Inside the car it takes a while to find the changes too. It is mostly the feel of the car that has improved. No longer are the individual parts drawn by different designers and only first brought together in the car. The interior is no longer a mishmash, but a harmonious whole. A European car however still has more charm and flair.

When it comes to price/performance, this Japanese is a great match for the European competition; the equipment is comprehensive and modern. The car was tested during very hot weather but the climate control system is so powerful that a polar breeze could blow through the cabin if so desired. The double sunglasses holder in the roof is useful. The radio with a 6-CD stacker in the dashboard is pleasant.

Unfortunately the rather thin steering wheel is only adjustable in height and not in distance to the driver. The headrests are not adjustable enough in height to guarantee the safety of tall drivers.

All Wheel Drive

The Forester is, like any other Subaru, an ideal tow vehicle for caravans. Firstly this is thanks to the low gearing. This means that there is a second gearbox, which offers extra gears under the usual first gear. This makes the car extremely powerful which is useful when towing large trailers up, for instance, a hill.



Not every Subaru has low gearing, but every Subaru does have 4-wheel drive. During a first introduction with the Forester the car appeared to do quite well with it off-road. The limited underfloor clearance doesn't make the Forester into an all-terrain vehicle though.

This is why Subaru rather speaks of "All Wheel Drive" to explain that it is not about off-road performances but about safety. Subaru takes it a step further than average thanks to "Symmetrical All Wheel Drive". This system has now been advanced with "Active Torque Split", a nice term for "a smart way of distributing the power on to the wheels". The systems work together in a way that in case one or more wheels skid the car remains on its chosen path and it is easily corrected.



If all else fails, the brakes are more powerful than before as well. This is nice but as a result the car does dip and swing quite considerably with heavy braking.

Engines

Stronger brakes belong to a stronger engine. The 2-litre 4-cylinder boxer engine has 30 horse power extra which brings the total up to 158. This doesn't give a better performance but it does result in a livelier character. The effect of the accelerator, especially at higher revolutions, is more direct than before. From standstill the power source seems to hesitate slightly but after that performs well every time. At moderate acceleration, like the need to overtake on single carriageways, the Forester 2.0 performs extremely well.

Even when the car needs to work hard, the sound level is slightly lower than before. The light ruffling sound is characteristic for the "boxer engine". This is a slightly different type of engine than usual that is simpler in design (read: more reliable) and puts the centre of gravity lower in the car (read: better road holding).

Turbo

The 2-litre engine doesn't fall short but whoever still wants (much) more there is a 2.5-litre boxer engine with turbo. During the last test this source of power made a cartoon-like car of the Forester. The engine was so fast that the rest of the car seemed to struggle to keep up. That has improved in the meantime but the Forester turbo is still so fast that one would still question what is the purpose of it all.

The turbo now offers not 210 but 230 horse power and whoever is not careful with the clutch has to endure some punches or will end up in a spectacular 4-wheel spin (that is easily corrected thanks to the above mentioned technology). Whoever wants to look at a rally while driving at rally-speed instead of just viewing it from the stand has found a good one in the Forester turbo. This is no exaggeration, for the turbo accelerates from 0 to 62,5 in exactly 6 seconds, which makes it one of the fastest SUV's on the market!



Conclusion

The Subaru Forester was a favourite in its class and it still is. The reason for it remains the same too. Comparing the Forester to most SUV's it offers better road holding qualities at lower costs with reliable technology. The road holding qualities are better because of the exterior. This is not a high "fake Jeep" but a generously sized estate car. The centre of gravity therefore is lower which makes the car stable and safe.

The low costs start with a good price/performance ratio. The fuel consumption is slightly better than average, while reliability of the Subaru technology is almost legendary.

The improvements make the Forester more harmonious and pleasant in daily use on all points. The engines perform better, the transmission makes the car even safer and the looks are slightly more modern. ■



Specifications

Subaru Forester (2005 - 2008) 2.5 XTE

Size and weight

Length x width x height	449 x 174 x 159 cm
Wheelbase	253 cm
Kerb weight	1.460 kg
Trailer	750 kg
Trailer - braked	2.000 kg
Fuel capacity	60 l
Luggage space	387/1592 l
Tyre size	215/55R17

Engine and performance



Capacity	1994 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	230 PS @ 5600 rpm
Max torque	320 Nm @ 3600 rpm
Drive	four wheel drive
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	6 secs
Top speed	216 km/h
Average mileage	10.7 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	14.7 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	8.4 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	254 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 23,640
Price base model	Â£ 17,620