

## 2002 Subaru Impreza WRX



Savannah, Ga. - "Wow! That's quite a blue, isn't it?" asked the guy at the rest stop. I replied, "It's Subaru's racing blue."

The Impreza WRX wears Subaru's racing color because this is the highest performance Subaru ever sold in

this country. Everywhere else in the world, Subaru and high performance are not oxymorons.

Japan, Europe and a few other parts of the world have been enjoying the outrageous WRX for several years, but Subaru asserted that it would be too expensive to certify in the United States.

Thanks to the success of the Impreza RS, Subaru finally decided that with the redesigned 2002 Impreza, U.S. customers deserve some serious performance. While not the 280+ horsepower available elsewhere, the turbocharged 2.0-liter, 227-horsepower flat-four provides a whole lotta power for a sedan a hair shorter than a Corolla. Interior appointments include a fat Momo steering wheel and purposefully sculpted sport seats. Lesser Impreza's will have the former RS's 2.5-liter flat-four as standard.

While testing, we were encouraged to drive the all-wheel-drive Impreza like we'd stolen it. The little blue Subaru handled it all with style.

The starting price is \$23,995.

- Lyndon Conrad Bell

## 2001 Chrysler Sebring convertible



Rancho Mirage, Calif. - Deep in the California desert, the road stretches out in front of me perfectly straight for what looks like two miles. No other cars in sight, all around me is flat, open land. You know what's next -- foot

to the floor! The 200-horsepower, 2.7-liter V6 in the redesigned 2001 Sebring convertible says "yeah, baby," and the velocity of the open cruiser escalates rapidly.

Highly stable at high speeds, the Sebring convertible is a great road car that just happens to look pretty driving around town. It is relatively free of body flex, the steering is direct and very accurate, braking is commensurate with the performance potential of the car and its road holding abilities will pleasantly surprise you.

If they could build in more legroom for the driver, reconfigure the buttons on the stereo so you don't change CDs when you really just wanted to adjust the treble, give it an automatic climate control system, and add audio controls to the steering wheel, they'd have a home run. As it is, they have hit a solid triple. At \$29,855 fully loaded, and room for four, the Sebring convertible represents a pretty good deal.

-Lyndon Conrad Bell

## 2001 Kia Optima



Sonoma, Calif. - The handsome silver car is drawing admiring glances from passersby in the parking lot at the upscale Northern California resort.

Well heeled individuals who could afford any car they want, ask; "What kind of car is that?" I respond with a smug smile, "Kia...Kia Optima." I'm used to being questioned about cars, because I'm almost always driving something interesting, but a Kia?

The Optima is a head turner, with crisp flowing lines and tasteful chrome accents that blend together to make the flagship Kia quite a looker.

The pleasantries continue when the car is underway, thanks to a smooth and compliant ride from the all-independent suspension. The 2.5-liter V6 makes 170 horsepower and moves the car quite effectively. Rack and pinion steering provides great responsiveness and road feel, making Optima reassuringly competent on winding roads.

More sound deadening would be appreciated, as road noise has a way of creeping into the interior. But overall, this is a fine automobile and at \$22,269 fully loaded, it represents real value.

For that price, you get leather, power windows, moonroof, CD player, keyless entry, a V6 engine, and a host of other amenities that drive the price of most cars well north of \$25,000.

- Lyndon Conrad Bell

## 2001 Toyota Sequoia



Dearborn, Mich. - As big as they are, the Chevrolet Tahoe, GMC Yukon and Ford Expedition are going to have to move over and let the Toyota Sequoia past.

Toyota has come up with a full-size, eight-passenger sport-utility that has the potential to become the benchmark of the "full-size" SUVs.

Toyota's engineers have managed to create a really big sport-utility that gives the driver the impression of being in a much smaller vehicle. This is a virtue that the competitive vehicles lack. The Sequoia's 32-valve, 240-horsepower V8 makes for a quiet and responsive power plant. Coupled with Toyota's four-speed ECT transmission, this drive train makes one forget that one is in a big SUV that has a curb weight of up to 5,295 lbs.

Where the Sequoia's 315 lb.-ft of torque is really impressive is at highway speeds of 60 miles per hour to 80 miles per hour. Like high performance cars, the Sequoia can cruise at 80 miles per hour and you feel like you're doing half that speed.

What's more, engineers have managed to take the "float" out of the Sequoia's suspension; there's no truck-like bounce when the Sequoia goes over bumps.

With a price-range of \$30,815 to \$42,275, Toyota has landed smack dab in the middle of the full-size SUV market with a two and half ton thud.

- Frank S. Washington