

Portland Observer Auto Review

News and reviews on new motor vehicles

2009 Subaru Forester 2.5XT The Boxy Charmer Grows in Character

BY KATHLEEN CARR

The 2009 Subaru Forester, the third generation of this versatile, sure-footed pack mule, and Subaru still isn't quite sure what to call it. So far as we can discern the fuzzy corporate description, the 2009 Subaru Forester is a crossover-utility vehicle on a sport-sedan chassis.

In its first full redesign the Subaru Forester has moved closer to the mainstream than some fans might have hoped it would. The old model's boxy charm has been toned down, and what's left is a compact SUV whose driving dynamics are on par with some of the nimbler players in this segment. A few Forester die-hards may cry foul. The SUV remains as practical as ever, but now boasts enough refinement to merit serious consideration from anyone in the market to buy.

While the 2009 is only 3 inches longer than the previous generation, its proportions have changed, and it seems like the models exceptionally tall greenhouse was replaced by one of average height. In particular, the hood is higher, even though Subaru has always noted that its horizontally opposed engine style helped keep the hoodline



Specifications: 2.5-Liter 4-cylinder 224-hp @ 226 lb-ft. torque turbocharged engine; 4-speed automatic w/manual-shift mode transmission; AWD; 19-City 24-Highway MPG; \$30,660. MSRP

low and visibility high.

Ground clearance is also raised a bit, to 8.9 inches. Fog lights are an option. Turbo versions are distinguished by a hood scoop that funnels cooling air into the intercooler just under the hood.

Standard dual exhaust pipes add a sporty touch, as do the 17-inch alloy wheels that come on all but the base trim level. The doors have window frames now, which gives them a much sturdier feel when slammed than last year's frameless doors had.

The turbocharged 2.5-liter boxer-

4 has been substantially revised for 2009 and includes a new intake system, intercooler and turbo-charger as featured by the Legacy and Outback engines.

The turbo makes highway driving much more fun, merging into traffic less dramatic. The turbo requires premium gas; something to consider with the daily increases at the gas pump.

The 2009 Forester transmission is a five-speed manual or four-speed automatic for the base-model engine, while the turbo gets only the 4-speed automatic with manual-

shift mode.

When the Forester comes with a four-speed automatic transmission, the torque split for the AWD system constantly varies according to acceleration, deceleration and wheel slip, and as much as 100 percent of power can be directed to the wheels with the most grip.

The Forester's dash sits higher against the windshield than you'll find in many SUVs, which gives the cabin a more carlike feel and a lower perceived driving position. Thanks to the large side and rear windows, however, overall visibility remains

excellent.

Interior quality is good, if occasionally inconsistent. The materials vary: The upper dash panels have an upscale finish, but some of the plastics lining the glove compartment look grainy and cheap. The steering wheel has a satisfying grip, but I found the blue-and-white gauges a bit tacky. Other controls, from the turn signals to the window switches, show sturdy construction, and overall fit and finish is respectable.

Given that all-wheel drive is standard, the Forester packs impres-

sive value. Subaru shaved some \$1,200 off the sticker price for 2009, including a temperature/gas mileage display, A/C, cruise control, a CD player with an MP3 auxiliary jack, power accessories and remote keyless entry.

Standard safety equipment includes six airbags, with side-impact airbags for the front seats and side curtain airbags for both rows. The curtain airbags have tip sensors to deploy during a rollover. Active head restraints, four-wheel-disc antilock brakes, traction control and an electronic stability system are also standard. All five seats have adequately high head restraints.

We haven't said much about the styling, which unless you own a previous Forester, won't do much to tickle your excitement meter. The 2009 Forester looks a bit more upscale and sophisticated than its predecessors and avoids the cutesy look.

Driving the 2009 Subaru Forester is more exciting than staring at it. Tip the throttle on the turbo model and you get a smooth, lag-free response. The four-speed automatic could use another gear, but it had no problem working with the all-wheel drive to power us up and down steep rocky slopes and muddy, rutted trails.

It doesn't matter what you call the 2009 Subaru Forester. Although it's bulked up a bit and taken on the look of something serious, this is still at heart the same funky station wagon we have grown to love. It was a crossover; before crossovers were cool, a utility vehicle that's easy to live with.

Bringing Hope

continued ▲ from Metro lives.

Through a rigorous encounter with great texts and ideas, the program hopes to foster the intellectual and personal growth of the participants, to further their engagement in civic and community life, and to make it possible for them to choose to continue their education.

The 12-week class met 23 times to evaluate everything from works

of Plato to the U.S. Constitution, "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" and W.E.B. DuBois' "The Souls of Black Folk."

The EPCO inmates who participated say they plan on leaving prison more confident and ready to continue on a road to higher learning.

"Although we still have a long hard road to the perfect world, we have the ability to accomplish anything we put our mind to," wrote another inmate.

Housing Designed Affordable and Green

continued ▲ from Metro

Shaver Green will include most if not all of the following green features: Sixty percent or better performance beyond the Oregon Energy Code, saving 7,320 therms per year; solar roofing system to achieve some on-site power generation; use of materials with superior durability for high traffic areas; use of recycled and pre-fabricated materials; storm water management and zero potable water for irrigation; dual flush toilets and shower heads; and

low-flow lavatories.

Armstrong said his company is selecting finishes and building materials to not only achieve the goals of sustainability but also to keep cost as low as possible while building living spaces that will last and remain affordable for at least 60 years.

"Our hope is that through this development, we can encourage other affordable housing developers to incorporate more sustainable elements. We intend to demonstrate that a sustainable, high-quality building can have

an impact beyond the local and regional green building market," Armstrong said.

The fully-funded development is being financed by Armstrong Stafford, the city of Portland's Bureau of Housing & Community Development, U.S. Bank Commercial Real Estate Division, Key Community Development Corp., Multnomah County, State of Oregon Housing and Community Services, Portland Development Commission and Housing Authority of Portland. The architect is DECA Architecture.

Leadership

continued ▲ from Metro

influence the American educational system.

He was attracted to "the idea that you can take people who wouldn't readily have access to this highly valued kind of education and bring it to them and say, 'What can you do with this?'"

For more information about the Humanity in Perspective program for low-income adults who have struggled with education from a young age, contact Phoebe Wayne, 503-241-0543, extension 12 or e-mail pwayne@oregonhum.org.

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