

Subaru Legacy 2.2GX



What's new . . .

A recent freshen-up brings curvy new looks to lighter but stiffer saloon and estate car bodies, now with a longer wheelbase. Underbonnet changes give more bottom-end punch to familiar "boxer" engines. ABS and two front airbags standard. 4-Cam Turbo dropped.

THERE'S A SURPRISE IN STORE AS SOON as you slide into the latest Legacy. Not only does the new body look smoother and more sophisticated from the outside, Subaru's make-over has worked a similar trick inside the cabin, too.

The windscreen has been moved forwards to give the cabin a lighter, more airy feel, but, just as significantly, there's now a much improved quality look and feel to the interior – to the fascia, in particular. There's a touch more headroom (achieved by lowering the driving seat by 1/2in), together with greater fore and aft seat travel, while the driver's seat has both height and lumbar support adjusters. The steering wheel is tilt-adjustable, too.

The surprises continue once you get under way. The lovely deep off-beat note Subaru's flat-four makes at full chat has a certain reassuring appeal, but it's more in keeping with the fire-spitting, rally-bred turbo models than more conservative bread-and-butter models.

Now, though, not only has Subaru beefed up the low- to mid-range delivery of its two- and 2.2-litre flat-fours, it's also managed to make them quieter and more refined. There's a small penalty in ultimate power – now 113bhp (two-litre) and 126bhp (for this 2.2), compared with 123 and 134bhp previously.

As we previously tested the 2.2 in automatic Estate form, we're unable directly to compare the effects these changes have on performance. However, the 2.2GX's combination of a lusty, willing power unit and reduced kerb weight, allied to modest overall gearing, gives it a reasonably lively gait.

It's not a patch on the adrenalin-pumping 4-Cam Turbo available in the previous range, of course, but the extra mid-range punch more than makes up for a small top-end reduction. Also, the quicker overtaking ability, smoother, more subdued delivery and a

PERFORMANCE

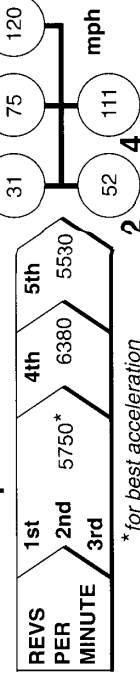
Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph 3.4	0-60mph 9.9	1/4 mile 17.5
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mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS	1.7	3.7	6.5	9.8	
IN 5TH GEAR	5.4	10.6	15.9	22.1	
IN 4TH GEAR	3.8	7.6	11.8	16.2	

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES	11.4/8.0	10.6/7.6	10.5/8.0	11.5/8.6	

Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION

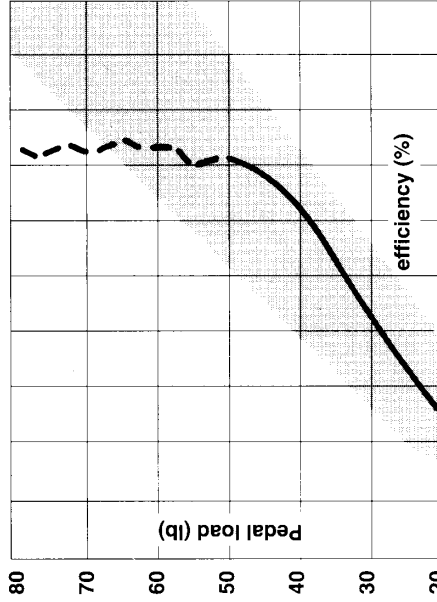
Fuel grade for tests: unleaded Premium, 95 octane

Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	24 1/2
Short journeys in the suburbs	26 1/2
Motorway - 70mph cruising	31 1/2
Brisk driving, mixed roads	31 1/2
Gentle driving, rural roads	35
Typical mpg overall	31
Realistic tank range*	53 litres/360 miles

** based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience*

SAFETY

Brakes (with ABS) How pedal loads affect braking



Braking efficiency shown as a percentage of gravity (ie 100% = 1.0g). Ideally the braking curve should be a gentle sweep and lie within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light - although this is more acceptable on cars with ABS. When the curve becomes broken, the ABS is operating.

50-0mph best stop 98% / 85ft

Handbrake only 34%

Fade test

How hard use affects braking (Ideal brakes show no change)

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb) 37

At start of test 30

After constant use 32

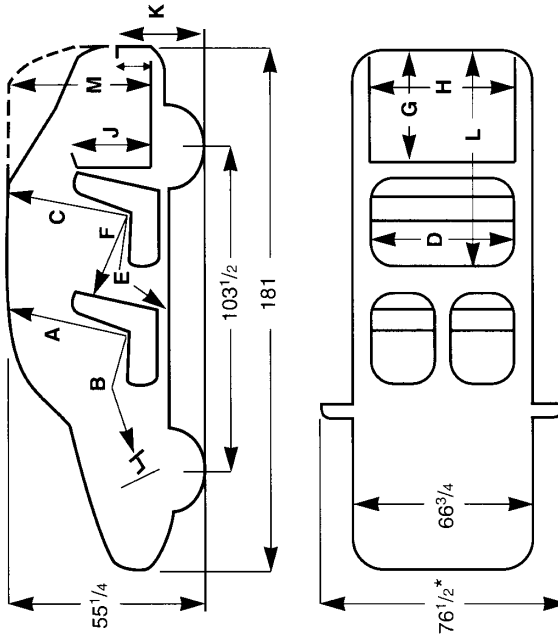
After severe use 32

Safety check list

Steering	true 'feel' of the road?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Brakes	powerful?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	sensible effort?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	fade resistant?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Seatbelts	front - effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	rears - effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Head restraints	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	front - effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interior	rear - effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	thoroughly padded?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fuel	shielded filler?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	protected tank?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



* 66 1/4 with mirrors folded

Inside (inches)

A Front headroom (without sunroof)	37 1/2-38 3/4	G Load length	40 1/4
B Front legroom (min - max)	33 1/2-42 1/4	H Load floor width (min - max)	37 1/2-54 1/2
C Rear headroom	36 3/4	J Load height	17
D Back seat width (between armrests)	51	K Sill height (inner/outer)	5 1/4/25
E Typical rear * legroom	39 1/4	L Load length	72 1/2
F Typical rear * kneeroom	30 1/2	M Load height (to tailgate hinge)	NA

* "Typical" represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger's seat set at 41in

generally unfussy nature, add up to a feel-good factor at the wheel.

On the open road, the Legacy's (revised) fully independently sprung chassis really comes into its own, combining the reassurance of near idiot-proof four-wheel drive handling with a comfortable, unruffled ride. And, of course, there's the further satisfaction that it will take something approaching a full-scale Siberian blizzard or a tracked vehicle obstacle course to seriously impair progress.

Surefooted handling and well-weighted, communicative steering help to avoid the accident in the first place. But, should it all go wrong, there are twin front airbags (except on the 2.0GL) and side impact beams in each of the doors to reduce the risk of injury. ABS provides complementary safety benefits here, too, but again, the entry-level 2.0GL misses out.

In manual transmission form, the 2.2GX comes with Subaru's novel "hill-holder" clutch. We've encountered this handy little driver aid before, but are still impressed by its thoughtful provision. It allows the driver to hold the Legacy on a slope without having to resort to split-second jiggery-pokery on the handbrake, simply by keeping the clutch pedal depressed after bringing the car to a halt on the footbrake.

Despite keen pricing, the Legacy comes with a generous catalogue of goodies, although a sunroof of any form is a notable omission. In addition to items already mentioned, all Legacys come with power steering, central locking and electric windows, 60:40 split-fold back seats, map-reading lamps and a rev counter. There are also rear footwell heater ducts, a headlamp

load leveller and an anti-theft immobiliser, while the 2.2GX adds headlamp pressure washers and up-grades the central locking to remote infra-red control.

Front or back, seat comfort and shaping leave a little to be desired, but, thanks to the two-inch longer wheelbase, but there's now more room in which the back seat occupants can stretch out. Headroom (unhindered by a sunroof in the front) is reasonably generous, too, although the high-roof Estate does even better in this respect.

At the back, the Legacy's new rounded lines conceal a good-sized cargo area with a generous 40in or so of load length to play with, even with the back seats in use. The saloon's split-fold back seats (with a "through load" facility) increase the versatility for longer, more awkward loads, but although there's a reasonably low sill to load over, the boot aperture narrows between the lamp clusters, while the height beneath the rear shelf is also rather restricted.

Four-wheel drive and modest gearing, together with a fairly substantial (albeit now some 65 lb lighter) kerb weight, are bound to take a toll of fuel consumption. Nevertheless, the Legacy's boosted mid-range punch pays dividends, not just in general driveability but in mpg, too.

Despite all the factors working against it, we averaged 31mpg overall in the 2.2GX. Not only is this pretty respectable in its own right, but measurably better than we obtained for the previous two-litre manual model. The mid-20s would be a more realistic expectation for short journey work or harder use, though 35-40mpg shouldn't be too difficult on a long gentle run. The Legacy is an unfussy filler, and there's

Continued overleaf



a low-fuel warning lamp to help eke out the last few miles on each tankful.

There's no doubt that the new Legacy both looks and feels better screwed together, with an altogether more solid and refined feel to everything. Details such as paint finish and shut lines are up to the usual high standards we've come to expect of the Japanese.

Subaru's flat-four power unit does wonders for underbonnet accessibility when it comes to routine fluid-level checks, or even the odd spot of DIY. The three-year/60,000-mile warranty and three-year breakdown assistance provide further peace of mind. Insurance doesn't look quite so attractive, though, with the 2.2GX carrying a steepish Group 14 rating.

VERDICT

We had quite a soft spot for the old Legacy, but with new looks, better engines, boosted refinement, improved economy and a bit more space, too, the new model has even more going for it.

Add generous equipment, keen pricing, assured year-round mobility and something a little bit different under the bonnet, and the Legacy makes a convincing case for itself.

Despite its new suit, there are probably more distinctive and exciting cars to look at, but it's an attractive and versatile alternative to some of the blander mid-sized rep-mobiles on offer, especially in its commodious estate car form.

HOW IT COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom - front (in)	Typical leg/kneerom - rear (in)	Steering turns/circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Subaru Legacy 2.2GX (4 door)	2212/126	120	9.8	22.1/16.2	31	94/60*	42 ¹ / ₄	39 ¹ / ₄ /30 ¹ / ₂	3.2/35 ³ / ₄ (p)	181
Ford Mondeo 2.0i 16v Ghia (4 door)	1989/136	122	9.5	22.8/15.1	30	101/36*	43	40/28	3.0/34 (p)	176 ¹ / ₂
Renault Safrane 2.0RN (5 door)	1996/135	125	11.1	31.2/22.8	29	83/40*	41	39/31 ³ / ₄	3.2/35 ³ / ₄ (p)	186 ¹ / ₂
Rover 620i (4 door)	1997/115	119	10.7	25.5/18.7	32 ¹ / ₂	92/25	44 ¹ / ₂	38 ¹ / ₄ /27	3.1/38 ¹ / ₂ (p)	183
Saab 900 2.0i S (5 door)	1985/133	121	10.5	32.3/22.1	32 ¹ / ₂	NA	43	38 ¹ / ₄ /28 ³ / ₄	3.4/34 ¹ / ₂ (p)	182 ¹ / ₂
Vauxhall Omega 2.0i 16v Select (4 door)	1998/134	131	10.2	27.2/20.4	34	96/40*	46	40 ¹ / ₄ /32 ¹ / ₄	3.1/35 (p)	188 ¹ / ₂
Volvo 850 2.0S (4 door)	1984/143	122	9.6	27.6/18.6	30 ¹ / ₂	86/40*	43 ¹ / ₄	40/32 ¹ / ₂	3.2/34 ¹ / ₂ (p)	183 ¹ / ₂
						* with ABS			(p) power assisted	

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, longitudinal flat 4; water-cooled. 96.9mm bore x 75.0mm stroke = 2212cc. Aluminium block and cylinder heads; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 9.5:1

Valve gear single belt-driven overhead camshaft per bank actuating four valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel system Hitachi/Subaru electronic multi-point fuel injection, three-way regulated catalyser, lambda sensor. 60-litre (13.2-gallon) tank, with low-fuel warning lamp. Fuel required: unleaded only, 95 octane minimum

Ignition system fully programmed electronic, via distributorless twin-coil HT system

Maximum power 126bhp at 5200rpm

Maximum torque 142 lb ft at 4400rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch diaphragm-spring, dry plate; cable-operated. Pedal load/travel: 25 lb/5¹/₄in

Gearbox 5-speed manual (all synchromesh) and

reverse. Ratios: first 3.55, second 2.11, third 1.45, fourth 1.09, top 0.87 and reverse 3.42:1. (Dual-mode four-speed automatic available on 2.0 and 2.2 litre)

Final drive 3.70:1, permanent four-wheel drive via viscous-coupling centre differential

Mph per 1000rpm 21.7 in top, 17.4 in fourth

Rpm at 70mph 3225 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs and an anti-roll bar. Rear: independent by coil spring/damper struts, trailing arms, twin transverse links and an anti-roll bar. Dampers: telescopic all round

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion, with 3¹/₄ turns between full locks. Turning circles average 35³/₄ft between kerbs, with 55¹/₂ft circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5¹/₂J x 14 steel with 185/70R14 88H tyres (Semperit Top-Speed on test car). Compact emergency spare

Brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear, with vacuum servo. Four-channel ABS standard on 2.0GLS and 2.2GX