

FIRST  
DRIVE

## Subaru Legacy Outback

Featured model: H6-3.0



**T**HE OUTBACK IS ANOTHER OF those executive-class estate cars with permanent four-wheel drive that ensures it's equally at home on grass and gravel as it is on city streets.

It's really a Legacy estate with a tough-guy persona, thanks to its hefty looking moulded bumpers, wide side cladding and 20cm ground clearance.

And now there's this latest range-topping model, powered by a new flat-six, three-litre engine that pumps out a stirring 206bhp.

It's automatic only, but if the four-speed transmission's slush pump internals blunt the H6's performance, you would hardly know it – it's a smooth and spirited performer. Subaru claims 0-60mph in 8.5sec and a maximum speed of 130mph. Swift acceleration is accompanied by a characteristic "boxer" thrum, which fades to a remote hum when motorway cruising.

As well as being deficient in cogs to the tune of one, the automatic 'box is no match for the admittedly pricey but sophisticated Tiptronic and Geartronic five-speed automatics of the Audi Allroad and Volvo Cross Country. Its upshifts can't be faulted, but it's sometimes indecisive in kickdown mode and its sinuous gear selector movement is far from ideal.

Belying its ability to cope with a certain degree of rough and muddy off-roading, the Outback proves to be remarkably competent on the road. Other than reacting quite firmly to backroad potholes, the suspension gives a smooth, refined ride with only modest tyre noise.

The all-wheel drive and traction control systems see to it that the car rarely puts a foot wrong, either – roadholding is excellent, with cornering roll held well in check, too. The light steering could well do with more feel, however.

Various electric adjustments for the generously proportioned seat give a bespoke driving position, with first-class all-round vision (head restraints apart). Multi-purpose stalks, big clear instruments and convenient switches make life easy for the driver, as well. There's also a generous inventory of equipment.

It's not as roomy as those of its rivals, but the leather-clad cabin offers reasonable space in all directions – for those in the back, too.

The load height of the wide, fully carpeted luggage area isn't over-generous, but the 60/40 divided back seats fold easily to provide a long, flat deck.

## VERDICT

**It's a true double-sided character, this Outback. One minute it can be demonstrating its creditable cross-country credentials, the next, storming along tarmac roads with all the grunt and grip of a sporting saloon. And it's all done in comfort and style. There are other cheaper 4x4 estates on the market, of course, (including Subaru), but this competent all-rounder undercuts its obvious up-market "soft-roader" rivals by a handsome margin.**

## AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

|                    |       |
|--------------------|-------|
| Controls/displays  | ★★★★○ |
| Handling/steering  | ★★★★○ |
| Comfort            | ★★★★○ |
| Space/practicality | ★★★★○ |

## THE LEGACY OUTBACK RANGE

**size and type** large executive 4x4 estate car (premium priced)

**trim levels** 2.5 and Lux, H6-3.0 (with leather)

**engines** petrol: 4 cylinder/2.5/154bhp 6/3.0/206; diesel: none

**drive** permanent 4-wheel drive.

2.5: 5-speed manual (4-speed stepped automatic with torque converter optional). H6-3.0: 4 speed automatic (no manual option)

**notable features** (H6-3.0) self-levelling rear suspension, ABS, traction control, cruise control, climate control, CD player, 8-way power driver's seat, side airbags, leather/wood trim, heated front seats, two sunroofs, wiper de-icer, 1800kg towing capability

## VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

|                                                        |          |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>length x width (folded mirrors)</b>                 | 472x175  |
| <b>front</b> - legroom                                 | 88-106   |
| - headroom (with sunroof)                              | 91-96    |
| <b>rear</b> - typical legroom                          | 98       |
| - typical kneeroom                                     | 69       |
| - headroom (with sunroof)                              | 90       |
| - hiproom                                              | 129      |
| <b>load space (all seats in use)</b><br>(litres/cu ft) | 545/19.2 |
| <b>load length (seats up/folded)</b>                   | 104/168  |
| <b>load width</b>                                      | 107/136  |
| <b>load sill height (inside/outside)</b>               | 0/63     |
| <b>boot/load aperture height</b>                       | 43/78    |

## LIKES ...

illuminated ignition switch keyhole shopping bag hooks in load area radio aerial built into side window easy-to-remove load cover cassette Subaru's reputation for reliability

## and GRIPES

minimal adjustments to left front seat more air to right footwell than left indicators "tick" too quietly tiny tell-tales in foglamp switches crude front number plate mounting