

Subaru Impreza

Featuring 2.0 Turbo 5-door

**Four-door saloon version**

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SUBARU IS ALMOST AS SYNONYMOUS WITH four-wheel drive as is Land Rover. Yet the company – automotive wing of the giant Fuji Heavy Industries group – has come light years from the staid L-Series saloons, pick-ups and estates that formed the staple diet of farmers, vets and the like for many years.

A certain young Scotsman called Colin McRae, who has lifted the World Rally manufacturer's title three years on the trot, might have something to do with it. But a vastly improved (yet often overlooked) range of cars – which won the gold medal in the 1997 JD Power Customer Satisfaction survey – has, no doubt, played a significant role, too.

It seems hard to believe that the Escort-sized Impreza was introduced as long ago as mid-1993, though today's range differs significantly from the original line-up. It keeps faith with Subaru's hallmark flat-four "boxer" engine and permanent all-wheel drive formula, but instead of the original 1.6- and 1.8-litre power units, all Imprezas now sport two-litre power under the bonnet. The four-door saloon and estate-like, "bubble-back" five-door hatch come in GL and Sport guises, each with a hearty 125bhp up front. But bolt on a turbo, two huge fog lamps and some of the

butchest bonnet scoops this side of a drag racing "Funny Car", and you've got yourself a World Rally-class car all ready (and more importantly, *legal*) for the road.

In no time at all the Impreza Turbo established itself as a real classic in the eyes of many enthusiasts, offering, as it does, supercar-slaying performance at a sensible price. Subaru has been tinkering away under the bonnet recently to make it even better, with low-friction pistons, ignition and turbo revisions, and a bigger intercooler upping the power to 215bhp, to go with the fattened up torque curve (214 lb ft produced 800rpm earlier) introduced a year or so back.

Exterior looks and the cabin are given a useful freshen-up, too. All Imprezas now wear multi-reflector headlamps, new seat and door trim and dual (individual front and rear) seat-height adjusters, and ... yes, the inevitable facia-mounted cup-holder arrives on the scene, too. Both the Sport (which looks like a Turbo, but isn't) and the Turbo proper, enjoy new grilles, while other Turbo enhancements for 1999 include a bigger boot spoiler on the saloon, a deeper front air dam, uprated four-pot calipers for the big ventilated front discs, but most importantly, a Grade 1 Thatcham alarm and

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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

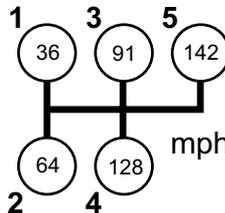
mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.1	2.1	3.4	5.2
IN 5TH GEAR		6.5	11.9	16.2	19.7
IN 4TH GEAR		3.5	6.1	8.4	10.8

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		14.3/8.2		9.6/4.9	
			12.1/6.2		7.8/4.7

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
		6950*		6950*	5860

* for best acceleration



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade: Unleaded premium, 95 octane	
Type of use - air conditioning off*	mpg
In the city - heavy traffic	13½
In the country - quiet driving	32
Typical mpg overall	23
Realistic tank range †	52 litres/260 miles

*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2-4% in winter and 4-8% in summer

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type front-mounted, longitudinal flat four. Alloy block and heads; five main bearings

Size 92.0 x 75.0mm = 1994cc

Power 215bhp at 5600rpm

Torque 214 lb ft at 4000rpm

Valves twin belt-driven overhead camshafts per bank actuating four valves per cylinder via bucket tappets

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point petrol injection integrated with distributorless ignition. 60-litre fuel tank, with low-level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual; full-time four-wheel drive with viscous coupling centre and rear differentials. No automatic option

Mph per 1000rpm 24.2 in 5th, 18.4 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by McPherson damper/struts, coil springs and lower arms. Rear: independent, coil spring/damper struts with trailing arms and twin transverse links. Telescopic dampers and anti-roll bars front and rear

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance; 2.8 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 10.9m between kerbs, with 14.9m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 7JJ x 16 alloy with 205/50R16 87V tyres (Bridgestone Potenza RE 010 on test car); "space-saver" spare wheel

Brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear, with vacuum servo. Electronic anti-lock control standard

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience (the more black blobs the better)

Seatbelts

front ●●●●○ rear ●●○○○

Door locking

●●●○○

central locking?

remote control?

auto window closure?

deadlocks?

Head restraints

front ●●●○○ rear ●●○○○

Interior

safety padding ●●●○○

driver's airbag?

other airbags? (1)

side impact protection ●●●○○

Luggage

secure from interior/hidden from view ●●○○○

Alarm

●●●○○

engine immobilised?

Fuel anti-spillage

●●●○○

standard on test car factory fitted option not available

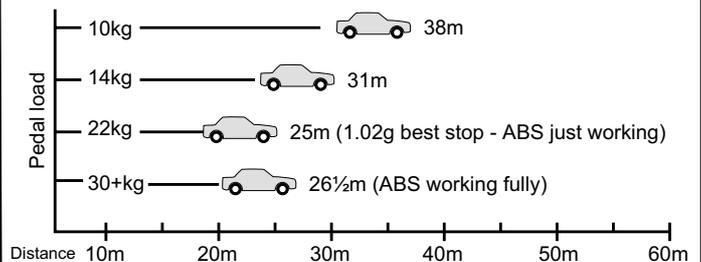
Euro NCAP crash test results - not available

BRAKES

Pedal feel ●●●○○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●●○○ Handbrake ●●●○○

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with standard ABS)

A good-to-average best stop is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal load

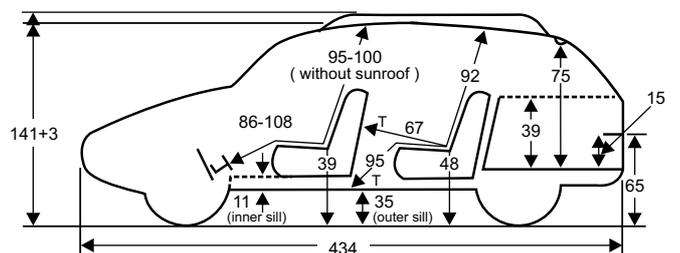


Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop: 12kg at start of test, 13kg at end of test (ideal brakes show no change)

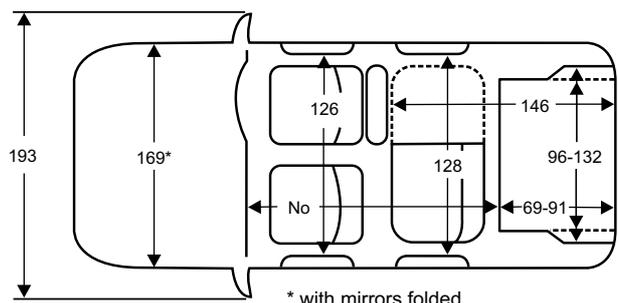
MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

Five door



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



* with mirrors folded

immobiliser designed to ensure that the Turbo stays parked on *your* driveway.

Before you even climb aboard and turn the key, you just know the Turbo means business. Outside, the spoilers, a bevy of bulges and bonnet scoops and big, meaty brakes peering out from behind the attractive five-spoke 16in alloys, are a none-too-subtle giveaway.

In sharp contrast, the interior (apart from the requisite discreet white-faced dials and a leather-skinned steering wheel) looks tame and tranquil – bordering on the bland, even – apart from two of the most comfortable, supportive racing-style seats you'll ever come across. There's no roll cage and no four-point, full-harness seatbelts, but settle into those supremely supportive, high-backed hip-huggers (complete with prominent shoulder "wings" to anchor you in place round the twisty bits) and you could easily be sitting in a full-blown race or rally car.

Fire up the engine and there's just a benign, off-beat burble to begin with, but as soon as you tread on the accelerator, it's time for action ... and how! With 0-60mph, or the kinder-on-the-machinery 30-70mph sprint, rifled off in a blink-of-an-eye 5.2sec and 142mph capability, this is one seriously swift Subaru. And with leech-like cornering, all-weather, all-wheel-drive grip and *banzai*" braking, those bear-hugging seats aren't there just for decoration.

In short, the Impreza Turbo can be breathtaking on the road, covering the ground with such devastating ease and surefootedness, that it nonchalantly runs rings round machinery costing many times its price. There's a small caveat, though: such power and poise not only raise the game to a higher plane, but place similar demands on the prowess and, particularly, the responsibility of the driver, such that any wayward "incident" that may arise could be as spectacular as the performance!

Such wrist-snapping performance is all well and good, you might say, but at what price fuel to economy? The Impreza Turbo isn't going to win any trophies for prudence at the petrol pumps, it need hardly be said, but driving with a sliver of restraint (which *can* be done), we got a not-too-flagrant 23 miles from each gallon, even breaking into the low thirties on a gentle jaunt. The Turbo's fuel tank is no bigger than standard, though, which means frequenting forecourts rather more often – about every 250 miles or so, on average.

Rapier-like straight-line pace is not only matched but exceeded by the Impreza's gravity-warping cornering capabilities, with abundant grip and traction supplemented by incisive steering feel and poise, together with gold-standard body control and balance.

Admittedly the ride is somewhat compromised as a result (it's nuggety round town, though not unbearably so), but this trade-off seems a small price to pay for such all-conquering agility on the open road.

On a more pragmatic note, the five-door Impreza provides comfortable cabin space for four adults, excellent all-round vision (courtesy of its frameless doors and generous glass area) and an adequate, but by no means extravagant, creature-comfort count. Central locking, electric mirrors and windows, "his-and-her" airbags, split-folding rear seat squabs and a roller-blind load cover are all there, for instance, but luxuries like air conditioning and even a sunroof are confined to the options list. Channelling most of the money to the important performance areas, without wasting any on superficial distractions, shouldn't upset too many enthusiasts, though.

Back seat passengers are catered for equally single-mindedly. Compared with the vice-like, extremely well-shaped perches up front, the flat, slab-shaped back seat is a poor relation; there's not even a centre armrest for occupants to brace themselves against. The tape measure reveals fairly meagre space there and, to a lesser extent, in the boot – a bit of a let-down, given that this hatchback-cum-cargo carrier's estate car looks promise more than they fulfil.

There's little wrong with the way the Subaru's screwed together. It looks a bit haphazard under the bonnet, and some might deem the fascia as "low rent", given the car's £21,500 price tag. Everything fits and works with customary Japanese precision, though, backed up by a comforting three-year/60,000-mile warranty. Don't expect the luxurious, up-market interior of the new Golf, and you won't be disappointed; as with the whole car, it's the book that's important here, not the cover.

VERDICT

Every once in a while, we stumble across a five-star nugget – a car possessed of raw, unadorned adrenaline-injecting qualities, yet shorn of all the hype and hoo-ha (and usually a sizeable price tag) that invariably go hand-in-hand with supercar scenarios. The Impreza Turbo is just such a gem.

Sporty with a capital S, but a sensibly commodious family carrier, too, there's a *genuine* wolf under this particular set of clothing, yet one that's equally at home playing the tame, untemperamental sheep when required. It's no limousine inside; there are also the small snags of a potentially voracious appetite for fuel and its group 17 insurance rating to swallow. These aside, though, the Impreza Turbo is a

HOW THE IMPREZA TURBO COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (m/kg)	Maximum legroom - front (cm)	Typical leg/kneerom - rear (cm)	Steering(p) turns/ circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
SUBARU IMPREZA 2.0 TURBO 5DR	1994/215	2890	5.2	19.7/10.8	23	25/22*	108	95/67	2.8/10.9	434
Alfa Romeo 156 2.0 Twin Spark 4dr	1970/155	3310	7.8	22.6/15.7	31	26/22*	106	95/76	2.2/11.4	443
Aston Martin DB7 Coupé 2dr	3239/335	2520	5.4	15.6/9.7	19	25/30*	NA	NA	2.8/12.3	463
Ford Mondeo 2.5 V6 5dr	2544/170	2955	8.2	21.7/15.0	29	23/22*	110	102/76	2.8/11.7	456
Honda Civic 1.8VTi 5dr	1797/169	3765	7.8	20.3/15.4	33	NA	110	97/70	3.5/10.6	433
Mitsubishi Galant 2.5 V6 4dr †	2498/161	2885	7.5	20.9/14.0	31	27½/16*	109	102/78	3.0/11.1	463
† performance/economy figures for estate						* with ABS		(p) all power-assisted		