

Forester Boxer Diesel



5:30am, support vehicle, pyrotechnics, cameras, drone all loaded up bar the kitchen sink and it's off to Wales we head.

We have a full-on day planned filming at Higgins Rally School (now known as the Forest Experience) nestled amongst the hills of Carno in beautiful Mid Wales - 900 acres of gravel stages, forest, off road and track heaven.

Very aptly we have chosen the new Subaru Forester for the test and later it will meet its fire breathing maniac relative - an anti-lag equipped WRC Impreza for an uphill gravel dash.



Here be dragons...

We test the Boxer diesel variant of the latest Subaru Forester on and off road - AWD goodness.



Back to the journey - it's 90 miles from Boys' Toys HQ via Shropshire to pick up our film crew for the day.

First things first - fire up the satellite navigation system. This is superb, having driven back the previous night with it the interface is clear and simple to use. Mapping is good and there are plenty of options to customise the interface to suit you.

This morning however it is no longer dark. This poses a problem for the shiny polished screen fitted to this model. There are, happily, options for brightness, contrast and also colour scheme but - try as we might - adjust it to see the menus and you can't see the map, and vice versa. With the excellent sun-roof open you may as well write off looking at the console screen altogether.

This is a great shame as the other screens fitted in here are well shaded and made from a matt finished material which does not reflect and all are easy to see.

Our advice - get it anyway as in the dark it's great - and pop down to Halfords for a Garmin for the bright days.

The reversing camera is well positioned and allows easy alignment with the tow bar - it's clear and shows a good wide view, though sadly the projected lines do not turn

with the steering to show where you will go but it's not the end of the world.

Miraculously we have picked a fine day for the shoot - as we head closer to Wales we appreciate the smooth relaxing drive of the Forester and its quiet, airy and comfortable cabin.

Over a variety of roads the suspension soaks up the surface and the punchy refined diesel is very satisfying to drive. Incredibly, near fully loaded and keeping up with traffic, we average 48.2mpg arriving unfatigued and ready for the day.

As we arrive and wait to be escorted onto the live stages one of the mechanics (a proper rally boy) comes over for a look and comments

on its aggressive face and versatile space inside - he thinks it would be a good chase vehicle - I am inclined to agree.

We are led out to the stages by Ross Leach's championship winning C2 challenge car through a wind farm, over concrete, asphalt, grass, water but sadly no fire.

The Forester handles these various surfaces well at all but very slow speeds where on rough rocky ground it loses

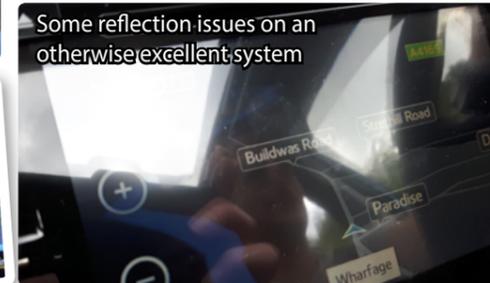


Well laid out simple clear interior is solid, functional and pleasing on the eye



some of its composure and becomes a bit choppy. We arrive at the cabin base where a rally team are testing. The 208 blasting through the gravel stages does lift some dust and we are very impressed with the filtration system on the Forester stopping all of it despite having the air conditioning on full.

The Forester is a well designed and practical vehicle, easily swallowing our luggage and us. Unlike most of its competition however, the Subaru has a definite off-road and rally sympathetic bloodline. Even in diesel family guise this car has the distinct feel of Impreza and Legacy - that's a good thing. Even the gear change feels the same.



Some reflection issues on an otherwise excellent system

The AWD system when pushed hard without care will gently and predictably understeer wide just like an Impreza, but drive it correctly and bring the weight forward into the bend then power out and the Forester responds with truly unbelievable grip even on gravel and loose surfaces.



"Drive it correctly and bring the weight forward into the bend then power out and the Forester responds with truly unbelievable grip"



The rather more spartan interior of the Impreza rally car - we love the hydraulic handbrake

Punchy Boxer

Over the day we find the Forester a joy to drive on the rough gravelly surfaces. Our cameraman will concur that at 50 mph on stage filming from the boot the ride is very good, with one seat folded down and the other two left up there's plenty to be strapped / held on to and the wide open (electric lifting and lowering) rear tailgate offers excellent filming (or i suppose shopping!) capability.

Whilst out exploring the 900 acres of tracks and woodland there's plenty of opportunity to consider the looks of the Forester. It's definitely a grower - handsome but not too everyone's taste - we think it suits bold colours better than the subtler shades.

The new generation Forester has moved up in terms of size and visual impact.

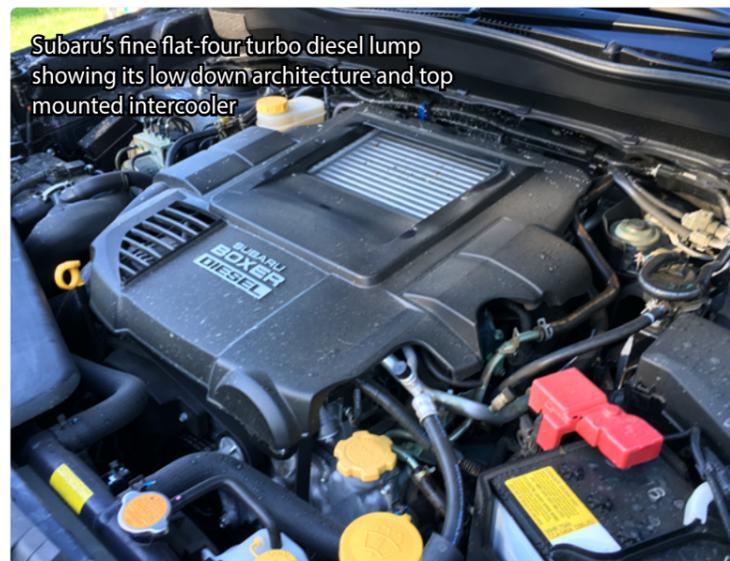
The body is chunkier, and more in line with the CR-V, RAV4 and other mid sized 4x4 vehicles.

One big difference to the competition however - this is a Subaru so we have permanent all-wheel drive rather than a part-time system or, much worse a front wheel drive lookalike.

The AWD gives superb grip in all conditions. Along with the low centre of gravity, flat wonder that is the Boxer turbo diesel engine. All making the Forester an agile, grippy and fun family machine.



AWD grip - careful of those diamond cut alloy wheels



Subaru's fine flat-four turbo diesel lump showing its low down architecture and top mounted intercooler

The boxer engine is punchy and delivers great torque between 2000 and 4000 rpm - it can however be easy to stall around idle.

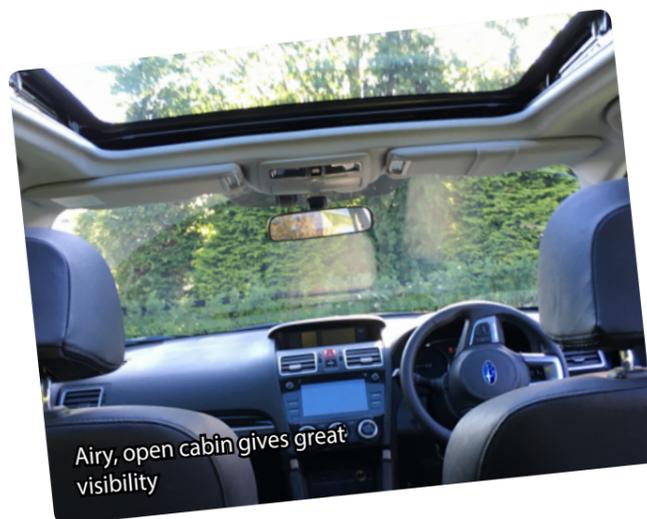
This engine oddly feels not unlike the 1.8T 225 BAM Audi engine with similar characteristics and a satisfying soundtrack and feel.

Fuel consumption is very good, unusually you will easily achieve the stated 45 mpg with us experiencing 60 mpg on a careful smooth drive.

Handling on and off-road feels solid and very sure footed, exceptionally smooth at speed if sadly a bit choppy at low speed over rough ground. Despite this the Forester has good body control and does not lurch off road or lean particularly on it. The auto is the better choice for towing and off road use as the manual clutch and fairly high first gear will inevitably take some hammer in the mud.

We found the Forester very capable off road only let down by departure and approach angles. Ground clearance is good but can be caught out at the summit of a steep hill. The AWD system will, however keep going through pretty much anything and not let you get stuck. Fitted to our demonstrator is a very interesting information screen which shows which wheel(s) are losing traction - not entirely sure why you need it but it looks great.

The Interior is beautifully put together, light, airy, simple and spacious, offering class leading visibility making it very safe and simple to manoeuvre. Materials are good quality and there is an air of quality.



Airy, open cabin gives great visibility

The dash is well laid out, all dials and controls are clear and simple, 10:10 Subaru.

The Forester is extremely agile for a car of its size. It is well damped, steering is direct and we found does offer good feedback despite some reviews to the contrary. Off road the self-levelling rear suspension is helpful.

The diamond cut alloy wheels on test are not best suited to off road use, best to opt for a simpler design if you are worried about damaging them - particularly important if you are considering leasing the Forester.

Cabin noise is surprisingly low both on and off road, one of the quietest in the class - making the Forester a relaxing place to be even at speed.

Both front and rear passengers have good legroom and the boot is very spacious, with both rear seats down you have an AWD van.

Towing is handled easily, rear visibility making this even easier, the Boxer diesel has more than enough grunt to tow up to (and beyond) rated capacity. We recommend the auto for towing as although the manual is very well geared it will give the clutch a hard time particularly when manoeuvring with a trailer.

The hill assist feature fitted to the Forester is, predictably, extremely good.

Our test car is fitted with keyless entry - this is a great system and it works well - but do set it up to not auto lock the doors as you can't get into the boot unless the engine is off when this setting is on. Also Subaru can we please have somewhere to put the key - i know it's keyless but having it in your pocket or rattling around in the many (very handy) large storage areas does not feel "right".

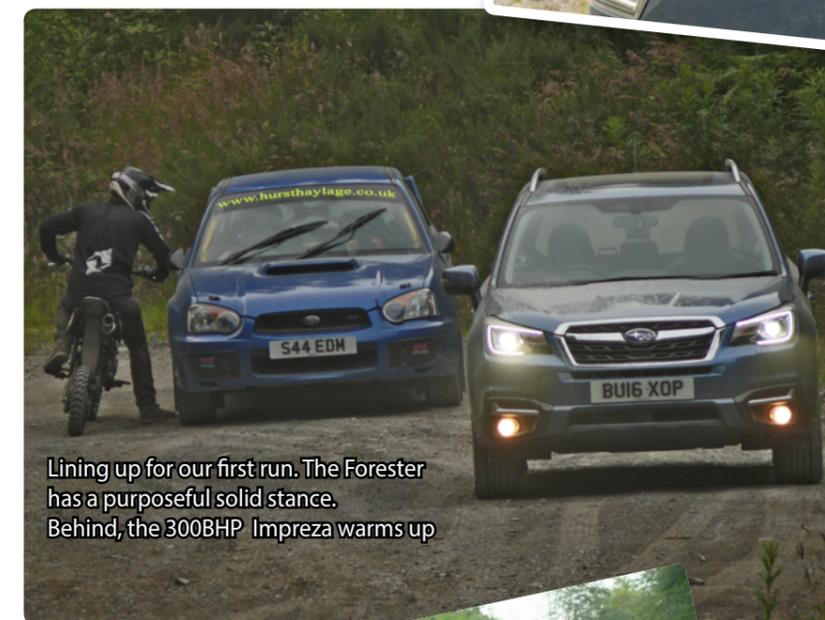
Our vehicle had a varied and rather busy week, including some family duties, a film shoot, firework show, off roading and of course our standard test route.

The Forester is a superb and practical all round vehicle, giving a rewarding and sporty experience combined with very relaxed effortless cruising ability, which we really were not expecting.

Even more surprising is the fuel consumption. Driven hard the Forester will return mid 40's mpg and driven carefully free of traffic we achieved over 60mpg cruising for around 50 miles. This we think is excellent for a mid-sized family 4x4.

So if you need to film a chase sequence together with a rally car and pit bikes, explore a blue-smoking off road forest landscape or you just need to pull the horsebox and fit in the Sainsbury's bags together with the kids you really must consider the new Forester - it's really rather good.

Watch our video here: <https://youtu.be/f7GyajfYfDY>



Lining up for our first run. The Forester has a purposeful solid stance. Behind, the 300BHP Impreza warms up



The Forester is very able off road for vehicle of its class.