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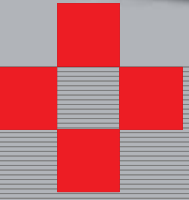
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NEW SUBARU IMPREZA

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(first look) 2012 subaru impreza

the right stuff



SUBARU executives readily admit their “anywhere, any time” all-wheel-drive rides aren’t always the prettiest. Nevertheless, the little automaker from Hiroshima, Japan, has been on a tear. In 2010, it posted its best-ever U.S. sales figures, an increase of 22 percent over 2009 for a total of 263,820 vehicles. In the last three years, as the rest of the

auto industry struggled with double-digit sales declines, Subaru was the only automaker that posted consecutive sales increases.

The key to this windfall? Subaru says attractive pricing and ideal vehicle sizing.

So it makes sense that the company chose to stay the course on price

and size for the fourth-generation Impreza, but to focus on improving two other vital characteristics of its best-seller.

“With the 2012 Impreza, we’re heavy up on style, and we’re heavy up on fuel efficiency. That’s where we go next,” says Michael McHale, Subaru’s head of corporate communications.

*FASTER, LIGHTER, AND WITH BETTER FUEL
ECONOMY? CONSIDER US IMPREZED.*

● words *nate martinez & edward loh* ● photographs *wesley allison*



RUNWAY READY The Impreza's
new profile is slim and athletic,
like a buff Baby Legacy.

(first look) 2012 subaru impreza



At the 2010 Los Angeles auto show, Subaru demonstrated its emphasis on style with the Impreza Concept. Like the Legacy Concept shown in 2009, the Impreza prototype demonstrated an athletic physique characterized by an aggressive nose and aerodynamic rear. Its profile was slim with a steeply raked windshield.

Many of the show car's design elements were translated into the striking 2012 Impreza. The hexagonal grille has wings flanking a prominent badge. The wide-set, hawk-eye headlamps rotate and set off a strong shoulderline and creased hood, both cribbed from big brother Legacy.

The base of the A-pillar has been relocated 7.9 inches forward for a longer, more rakish greenhouse. With the goal of providing class-leading visibility, Subaru thinned the A-pillars and detached the side mirrors from their bases. Windowsills were kept low, with partitioned glass at all the side windows.

The look is much improved over the flaccid previous generation. The 2012

Impreza has a muscular, Baby Legacy thing going on, especially the five-door hatch when viewed from behind. Chunky taillamps and a chiseled rear fascia butch up the gentle fender flares.

Visually, the sedan and five-door seem a lot bigger than the third-gen car. But that's Subaru's neatest party trick: The new Impreza stands no longer (180.3/173.8 inches sedan/hatchback) or wider (68.5 inches sedan/hatchback) than before. The half-inch-lower roof, shortened overhangs, wider track (plus 0.5 inch in front, plus 0.7 inch rear), and 1-inch-longer wheelbase (104.1 inches) provide the feeling of growth.

Another neat trick: At just under 2950 pounds, the new Impreza 2.0i weighs 164 pounds less than the outgoing model, thanks to such improvements as redesigned seat frames, a smaller gas tank, and a switch to electric power steering.

It's lighter, yet safer. In addition to new knee airbags and a brake override system, Subaru includes an expensive, hot-pressed-steel center

roof brace to improve chassis stiffness and strength. This, along with additional reinforcements to the junctures of roof rails and pillars, bumps up the roof crush strength to four times the Impreza's weight (the federal standard requires three times).

By now, eagle eyes will have noted the 2.0i reference. The last generation's naturally aspirated, single-overhead-cam 2.5-liter EJ-series flat-four gets ditched in favor of an all-new DOHC 2.0-liter FB20 mill (first seen in the Forester). This 148-horsepower flat-four makes 145 pound-feet of torque—22 horses and 25 pound-feet shy of the outgoing EJ25.

Before you gasp in disgust, hold onto your horses (and pound-feet). This new boxer is married to either a five-speed manual with revised gear ratios or a second-generation Lineartronic CVT, which replaces the archaic four-speed automatic. The CVT gets tweaked for reduced noise, improved smoothness, and wider ratio coverage for better performance.

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The nubile 2.0-liter is more efficient, easier to service, and cleaner than the mill it replaces. With the five-speed manual, drivers will reach an EPA-rated 25 mpg in the city, 33 mpg on the highway, much better than the 20/27-mpg rating of yesteryear. The same goes for CVT-equipped models: 27 city, 36 highway. That means a 7-mpg city, 10-mpg highway improvement over the four-speed automatic model. These days, those kinds of gains (30 percent) are unheard of and, according to our records, make the Impreza the most fuel-miserly all-wheel-drive vehicle in America.

And what of performance? Subaru claims the lack of grunt doesn't affect performance at all. In fact, with less vehicle mass to carry, a revised suspension with new front subframe cradle and stiffer pillow ball mounts, and a better aerodynamic signature (0.31 Cd for the five-door), the Impreza is reportedly faster and better-handling than ever. Subaru claims a 0-60-mph time of approximately 9.8 seconds.

That's not fast, but remember Subaru's

other goal: greater efficiency. With that teetotaling FB20 underhood, engineers chose to shrink the gas tank from 16.9 to 14.6 gallons, yet the new Impreza can travel over 65 miles farther—more than 520 miles between fill-ups. That smaller tank, along with other relocated components, also allows for an interior volume increase of 1.8 cubic feet in the sedan and 2.5 cubic feet in the hatchback.

Front passengers lose 0.6 inch of headroom with the new design, but rear passengers gain 1.9 inches of legroom. Backseaters also ride about an inch higher for improved visibility; and, to make it easier to climb in and out, the doorsills are 0.8 inch lower and the doors open wider. Even more impressive is the hatchback's 49.7-cubic-foot cargo volume (rear seats down) versus the old model's 44.4.

From base 2.0i to Sport Limited, the Impreza welcomes passengers with a quieter, better-insulated cabin filled with soft-touch material on its dash, doors, and center console. A three-spoke, tilt/telescoping steering wheel comes

standard on all models, as do 60/40 split-fold seatbacks, air conditioning, multifunction display, power locks/mirrors/windows, and four-wheel disc brakes.

Now that it's faster, lighter, more efficient, and much easier on the eyes, the 2012 Subaru Impreza looks to have all the right ingredients to make it another sales sensation. ■

2012 SUBARU IMPREZA

BASE PRICE	\$17,500-\$20,000 (est)
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door, sedan or hatchback
ENGINE	2.0L/148-hp/145-lb-ft DOHC 16-valve flat-4
TRANSMISSIONS	5-speed manual, cont variable auto
CURB WEIGHT	2950 lb (mfr)
WHEELBASE	104.1 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	173.8-180.3 x 68.5 x 57.6 in
0-60 MPH	9.8 sec (mfr est)
EPA CITY/HWY FUEL ECON	25-27/33-36 mpg
ENERGY CONS, CITY/HWY	125-135/94-102 kW-hrs/100 mi
CO ₂ EMISSIONS	0.64-0.69 lb/mi
ON SALE IN U.S.	Fall 2011