

It's what makes a Subaru a *mainstream* Subaru

First off, we should clarify what we just said. There is a certain contrast between Subaru's midsize Legacy sedan and, say, their WRX STI rally winner. But no Subaru is ever likely to be totally mainstream. Who would want that? The brand has a panache all its own. And the engine and drivetrain alone ensure the Legacy is going to be a different animal with a few advantages. But a midsize sedan is inherently a mainstream vehicle, and a brand new Legacy has just arrived.

The Legacy accomplishes its usual basic trick: fitting right in with the competition—better than ever—while at the same time delivering a Subaru personality all its own.

But it has a couple of other tricks. Every Legacy has Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive, an active torque split system with electronically managed continuously variable hydraulic transfer clutch. And both the 2.5-liter four and 3.6-liter six are low-slung boxer engines—the same opposing-cylinder format essential to the performance and handling capabilities of track-hugging race champions.

By Joe Sage

We ran the numbers on the Legacy and several key competitors—length, height, wheelbase, interior room, trunk capacity, horsepower, drivetrain options, weight, fuel mileage. It might take a five-dimensional holographic chart to show everything simultaneously, but in short, the Legacy is tops (or tied) for some specifications, competitive in all.

Of the five we charted—Accord, Camry, Fusion, Optima, Legacy—the Subaru is the shortest and has the shortest wheelbase. These are prime attributes if you value garage space, maneuverability or parking. It delivers these while having the most front headroom (tied with Kia), legroom in the middle of a fairly tight pack and trunk space close to the others. (A half cubic foot in the trunk means more to some than others, but is seldom the everyday benefit that tight handling is. And Legacy's cargo volume grows via 60/40 fold-down rear seats.)

Legacy is the only one with standard all-wheel drive, and Fusion is the only other that even makes it available. Base engines for all are in the 175- to 185-hp range, except for Kia at 192 (Legacy and Fusion tie at 175). Legacy achieves the best fuel mileage, except for Accord (same highway but one point better, city). Some have six-cylinder options (like the Legacy), others high-performance fours,



any of these with horsepower in the upper 200s. "Collectively, the Legacy will go up against anything," says Subaru VP Jeff Walters. "It checks all the boxes" as a competitive midsize sedan, adds Legacy product planning manager Peter Tenn.

TOUGH choices? That's the point. If Legacy was not on your shopping list, it needs to be. Subaru is the first to admit that their four-door sedan—in a lineup of vehicles that catch more attention, from Forester to Outback to WRX STI and so on—has been easily overlooked. They aim to rectify that. In fact, they've already started. In 2008/09, when the automotive market (and entire economy) tanked, Legacy sales did not drop at all. Since then, unit sales have quadrupled. And since others did drop, Legacy's market share has actually quintupled.

Share is still small—the industry overall works in very big numbers. Quintupling moved it from 0.5 percent to 2.5 percent, which represents what is on track to be somewhere between 470,000 to 475,000 vehicles this year. Their goal is to crack the 500,000 vehicle mark in model year 2016.

Peter Tenn has his eye on the ball. He sees the



outgoing Dodge Avenger's spot as beatable, at its market share of 3.9 percent. And despite its 17 percent share, he sees Camry as beatable. Legacy is in its sixth generation, and Tenn again emphasizes that "Camry is not better than Legacy." Subaru knows their brand identity has been centered on their crossovers, but reminds us that Legacy has been plying the roads for 26 years.

They are not letting aggressive sales goals get ahead of quality production. Subaru has one of the lowest inventories in the business, meaning the dealer turnaround time for their vehicles is quick. They say they can sell anything they can build.

Every Legacy sold in North America is built at Subaru's Lafayette, Indiana plant. (This plant is one of the greenest—a zero-landfill operation that has earned the National Wildlife Federation's only "backyard wildlife habitat" designation.)

When it comes to their four-door Legacy sedan, the goal is ambitious, to move from a 1.5 percent to a 2 percent market share—which is a 33.3 per-

cent gain. Walters suggests this is "a very reasonable target," since to do so, they have brought us a whole new Legacy for 2015. We have flown to California's Central Coast to get behind the wheel. "We hope you find the car as good as we think it is," Walters tells us as he hands us the keys.

THUS for this day, we became virtual members of the family. "Joining the family" is a meme for the brand. Walters mentions that other vehicles in the lineup—notably the WRX STI in his conversation—enjoy a clublike response, with waves from other owners and others in general. With the variety of vehicles we drive, we can vouch for the fact that this is special and it is rare—we've had it while driving Corvettes and Jeep Wranglers—and we can vouch for it with the STI, as we had been driving exactly that back in Arizona that same week, with a surpris-



The Legacy cabin is clean and spacious. Its instrument panel is feature-laden yet functionally straightforward. Seats are comfortable, as well as stylish and contemporary, befitting cars at twice this price. There is ample legroom front and rear, and cargo utility can be varied via a 60/40 fold-down rear seat.



SPECIFICATIONS

TRANSMISSION	CVT
DRIVETRAIN	Symmetrical AWD
FUEL REQUIREMENT	87 octane regular
TURNING CIRCLE	36.8 ft

2015 SUBARU LEGACY 2.5i

ENGINE	2.5L 4-cylinder boxer
POWER/TORQUE	175 hp / 174 lb-ft
WEIGHT	3455-3485 lb
MPG	26/36/30 (city/hwy/comb)
WHEELS (BASE 2.5i)	17x7 steel wheels
BASE PRICE 2.5i	\$21,695

2.5i PREMIUM ADDS: 17x7.5 alloy wheels, heated seats/mirrors, wiper deicer, 7" multi-touch gesture screen, voice-activated 6-speaker audio, Sirius, text, iTunes tagging, USB ports, auto up/down windows, body-color folding mirrors, dual-zone auto climate, trim and lighting upgrades, overhead console and more.

BASE PRICE 2.5i Premium\$23,495

OPTIONS: Navigation, EyeSight system w suite of electronic driving aids, and more.

2.5i LIMITED ADDS: 18x7.5 alloy wheels, 10-way power driver's seat w 2-position memory, 4-way power passenger seat, harman/kardon 576-watt 12-speaker premium audio, upgraded infotainment, heated rear seats, rear detection and blind spot detection, lane change assist, rear cross traffic alert, turn signals in folding mirrors, rear climate outlets, fog lights, trim, perforated leather-trimmed seats and more.

BASE PRICE 2.5i Limited\$26,495

OPTIONS: Nav, additional EyeSight driving aids, keyless entry/start, power moonroof.

2015 SUBARU LEGACY 3.6R

ENGINE	3.6L 6-cylinder boxer
POWER/TORQUE	256 hp / 247 lb-ft
WEIGHT	3662 lb
MPG	20/29/23 (city/hwy/comb)

3.6R LIMITED ADDS: Six-cylinder power, high-torque transmission w paddle shifters, dual stainless exhaust tips, HID low beams w auto height adjustment, 12.4" front rotors.

BASE PRICE 3.6R Limited\$29,595

OPTIONS: Same as 2.5i Limited.

Subaru's famous opposing-cylinder "boxer" engines—flat-four and flat-six—provide a low center of gravity for road-hugging handling, the same fundamental as in a 911.

ing amount of favorable reception from the audience at large. But "family" is also part of Subaru's overall vibe—in turn built upon the four pillars of adventure, safety, versatility and longevity, which they say adds up to owners' "love" of the product.

It's funny, in a way, this emphasis on emotion, since the product itself is highly competitive, especially in a cookie cutter world—which brings us right back to their four pillars, along with style and engineering niches already mentioned.

Legacy's average buyer has a household income of \$100,000—higher than most. It's a younger, active person's brand, especially hot with newlyweds. It's also a thinking person's brand, and buyers think they like it even as they sign on: Subaru has the top industry rating for "intended loyalty."

MANY things have been updated in the new Legacy. Its sheetmetal is new—more streamlined and muscular, they say. More mainstream, we might also say, and that's welcome; the previous generation was maybe more distinctive but a bit awkward in some of its details and proportions.

A little window at the A-pillar is part of reengineering that angles a high-visibility windshield for improved aerodynamics. Aerodynamics also benefits from an active grille shutter—as on hybrids—and more fully sealed undercarriage panels.

With outside width up by just 0.7 inches, the interior gains a full 2 inches, even with a full complement of side airbags and rollover side curtain airbags. This increases hip room, shoulder room and personal space between occupants.

The boxer engine, one of our favorite elements of this and every Subaru, has been completely redesigned, providing better fuel mileage, more horsepower, quicker acceleration, less weight and reduced noise. The rally-winning block is the same, but heads, pistons and other key parts have been completely upgraded.

The CVT (continuously variable transmission) now has a step shift setting—induced shift point equivalents to eliminate the droning effect of a truly continuous power curve. You can switch to the straight smooth, shiftless curve if you prefer.

Legacy has new suspension front and rear, and active torque vectoring—always on—improves

Highway One—from Monterey through Big Sur to San Simeon—was well-matched to Legacy's attributes—with cliff-hanging twists and turns, plus flat-out straightaways, demanding the most from Legacy's steering, brakes and boxer engine stability and handling. It's also a long drive, and the car's comfort and controls rated high. The route included Bixby and Rocky Creek (shown) bridges, Hearst Castle at our southern turnaround, a beach picnic and elephant seals sunning at Piedras Blancas.

handling on curves by applying light braking to the inside wheels, for a more neutral path through the twisties.

Noise-vibration-harshness reductions come from new glass, more foam and new liquid-filled engine mounts. The chassis has 43 percent higher torsional rigidity and 35 percent better bending stiffness. Super-high-strength hot-pressed steel throughout provides weight savings and enhanced crash protection, along with its chassis benefits.

CMOS cameras have better imaging and smaller housings, giving improved backup and surround view performance in bad light or bad weather. The EyeSight handling and safety system allows you to create a personalized list of presets, including for voice commands. An electronic parking brake replaces the prior mechanical job, creating a shoe-box-sized space big enough to hold your iPad.

The list of standard feature inclusions is long, from halogen lights to turn-coordinated foglights, to a new keyless system (Limited trim). You can leave the keys locked inside, while doing pocketless activities like swimming, then reenter with a PIN code. Options are reasonable and few (ever moreso as you move into the higher trims).

THE biggest sellers are not always the best or coolest—just look at the computer industry over the past 20 years or so. In midsize sedans, we would ignore the top few and go where there's more innovation and more excitement—to us a list of about four lower volume sellers. Subaru Legacy is one of these, and it's the only one with all-wheel drive. It also has an available manual transmission. And it's the only one on the whole full list of the entire segment with that fabulous boxer engine. ■

