

Vanilla with a spicy twist BY JOE SAGE

It has been widely noted that, among the 350 or so vehicles available in the market today, that venerable classic, the sedan, has an increasingly thin presence. Customers have been showing the most interest in crossovers and SUVs, and smaller models are the biggest sellers right now.

Subaru has long been well aligned with these trends. Two-door, rear-drive, Toyota 86-shared BRZ coupe aside, their lineup is half crossover-SUV and half sedans, though by far the lion's share of sales goes to the crossovers. Rather than tightening up on their sedans, however, they are seizing the moment to strengthen their share of the segment.

Not only has Subaru kept the Legacy sedan, it has brought us a completely new one this year, entirely familiar looking, but now built on the quieter, stiffer, safer Subaru Global Platform. The 2.5L boxer engine in most Legacy models is 90 percent new this year, offering 182 hp, 35 mpg highway and a zero-to-60 time of 8.4 seconds. Two XT trims, including the Legacy Limited XT driven here, bear the brand's first turbo in eight years—a 2.4L intercooled twin-scroll unit delivering 260 hp, 32 mpg highway and zero-to-60 in 6.1 seconds.

Legacy Sedan starts at \$22,745. Limited and our Limited XT are next-to-top, with perforated leather and other niceties. Top trim is a Touring XT adding

\$1700 in additional features (its cooled seats alone may be worth it in Arizona). Whether Limited or Touring, the intercooled twin-scroll turbo of the XT is the key difference (\$4450 more on Limited).

Fundamentals are all above grade for the price—advanced suspension, steering and brakes all proved themselves nicely on aggressive curves, freeway ramp acceleration, even the deepest of storm troughs. A CVT is not every critic's favorite transmission, though we suspect most owners are oblivious to them. The Legacy XT's high-torque up-engineered version is accurate and transparent, a nicer drive than many step-gear automatics (and with 8-speed-mimicking paddle shift, too). We're solid fans of all-wheel drive in a road car, and Subaru's Active Torque Split electronic AWD is a well-developed no-compromise powertrain.

Legacy's interior has increased passenger dimensions in all models. On ours, a range of tech is anchored in an 11.6-inch display with upgraded navigation and 12-speaker Harman Kardon audio, featuring very welcome control knobs.

We typically don't challenge or analyze our fuel mileage—far from it, as that could tend to detract from a normal driving experience. But we did notice the binnacle readout ran between 14.x and 17.x mpg over our week, well short of estimates.

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY PLANT	Lafayette, Indiana
ENGINE	2.4L twin-scroll turbo, intercooled 4-cyl boxer
HP/TORQUE	260 hp / 277 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN	Active Torque Split electronic AWD (only)
TRANSMISSION	high-torque Lineartronic CVT
	w 8-spd steering wheel paddle control switches
SUSPENSION	F: MacPherson-type strut w internal rebound spring, aluminum lower L-arms, stblzr bar;
	R: dbl wishbone w subframe, coil springs, stblzr bar
STEERING	quick-ratio elec pwr-assist rack & pinion
BRAKES	mech vacuum pump pwr-assist disc:
	F: dual-piston vent 12.4"; R: single-piston vent 11.8"
WHEELS	18x7.4 alloy w machine finish
TIRES	225/50R18 95V
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	190.6 / 108.3 in
TURNING CIRCLE	36.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	(w moonroof) 37.3 / 37.2 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.8 / 39.5 in
CARGO CAPACITY	15.1 cu ft
WEIGHT	3779 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY87 oct regular / 18.5 gal
MPG	24/32/27 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$34,195
DESTINATION CHARGE	900
TOTAL	\$35,095

Subaru famously has one of the absolute highest customer loyalty rates in the business—and new customers have multiplied strongly, too.

As for that familiar look, we'd recommend more evolution. If they would just give this nicely engineered all-wheel-drive car a sexier skin, it could be about like a half-price Audi quattro—and there would surely be huge interest in that. ■

Anything we'd change? We'd give the rear decklid better pneumatics and balance; we'd make auto stop-start defeat more readily accessible (though it was actually not particularly noticeable and could be largely ignored); and we'd sex up that exterior about ten-fold.

