

Smiles guaranteed

- by Joe Sage

BRZ is a different sort of beast in Subaru's stable. The basic formula is simple—a quick little lightweight enclosed sports coupe at a notably affordable price. Two defining points are that it's the only rear-driver (also the only two-door) in the otherwise all-wheel-drive Subaru lineup; and it's essentially the same car, though not entirely, as the co-developed Toyota GR 86 (previously Scion FR-S). Subaru sells over a half million crossovers but fewer than 100,000 sedans in the US annually. The BRZ tacks onto the lower volume end of the scale, with sales of just a couple of thousand units.

But rarity is a very cool thing in the automotive world. And Subaru's decision to create this car—probably somewhere between a coin-toss and a slam-dunk for the product planners—is welcome.

As Subaru buyers are a famously brand-loyal

bunch, this introduces them to something a little different they might have never seen otherwise.

BRZ's low slung nature and road-hugging center of gravity are thanks to Subaru's boxer (flat, opposing-cylinder) engine, while Toyota provides its fuel injection, and it's all built at Subaru's plant.

BRZ enters its second generation for 2022, with a larger, more powerful engine—moving from a 2.0-liter to a 2.4-liter four-cylinder boxer and from 200 or 205 hp (auto or manual) to 228 hp (either).

Structure is also improved in the new car, with a 50 percent increase in torsional stiffness. Suspension is slightly different between the Subaru and Toyota, with BRZ firmer up front and with a softer setup and a lighter sway bar in the rear. A track driver may note the handling difference between the two, while for daily drivers who even notice,

it's quite minor, and either has its fans.

The two are easily distinguished from front or rear—the Subaru's grille is wider and shallower, with more hood and fascia creases and contours creating a handsome, more chiseled nose; and its rear spoiler is lower, wider and more subtle.

Our sample is the top trim—of just two and by just \$2500. Either has your choice of six-speed automatic or that most enticing of sports car availabilities, a six-speed manual. The manual knocks \$1500 off the base (Premium) trim's price or \$1700 off our top trim Limited, for a gap between a base automatic and a top trim manual of just \$1000—a win-win for stick fans. All versions hover around \$30 grand, give or take a couple of thousand. And if that alone has just motivated you to run out the door to buy one, we would understand.

The manual transmission is one of the best, with extremely smooth operation, clearly defined gates

and clean ratios. (The automatic is upgraded with a new sport mode for more rapid downshifts and lower gears in aggressive cornering.)

Subaru BRZ is a 2+2 coupe, though typical of the type, the rear seat is likely to see little use. If you're tall, you will know it is low slung as you get in and out—that comes with the territory—though once settled in, we felt we could happily drive it coast to coast. A small-cabin bonus—the interior cools off fast and stays cool on the hottest summer day and will have the same benefit in winter.

Inexpensive though it may be, BRZ is also full of useful, appealing, thoroughly modern and sometimes unexpected features, materials and finishes.

The car's low profile, strong engine and weight under 2900 pounds in any trim add up to a power-weight-grip formula that's hard to beat.

In town or on the open road, the BRZ accelerates quickly and competently carves competitive corners. It's also able to deliver an inside-lane-to-inside-lane U-turn on most divided boulevards.

You may find yourself thinking the Subaru BRZ



is a German at a quarter of the price, or an exotic at a tenth, and you will always enjoy that comparative. On its own merits, it's the most sought after formula of all—affordable and a ton of fun. ■

Subaru sold about 10,290 vehicles with manual transmissions in the first six months of 2022, an overall rate of 3.9 percent for the full line (including CVT-only models). But for the BRZ, the take rate was 70 percent.

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Ota, Gunma, Japan
BUILD / SEATS	.....sport coupe / four (2+2)
ENGINE	.....2.4L 4-cyl boxer, alum/alum, DOHC 16v w dual VVT
HP/TORQUE	.....228 hp / 184 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....12.5:1
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd manual (auto avail)
DRIVETRAIN	.....Torsen limited slip RWD
SUSPENSION	.....F: sport-tuned indep MacPherson strut, 18.3mm stblzr bar; R: sport-tuned indep dbl wishbone style multi-link; 14mm stblzr bar
STEERING	.....electric power steering
BRAKES	..... F: 11.6 vented; R: 11.4 vented
WHEELS	.....18-in matte grey alum alloy
TIRES	.....215/40 R18 85Y Michelin Pilot Sport 4
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....167.9 / 101.4 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....35.4 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....37.0 / 33.5 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....41.5 / 29.9 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....6.26 cu.ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....5.1 in
WEIGHT	.....(Limited /MT) 2835 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....premium / 13.2 gal
MPG	.....(manual) 20/27/22 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....\$30,495
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....960
TOTAL	.....\$31,455

(Note: prices have increased; see below.)

2022 SUBARU BRZ LINEUP

Premium	.....6-spd manual	.....\$28,595
	.....6-spd auto (+\$1,500)	.....30,095
Limited	.....6-spd manual	.....\$31,095
	.....6-spd auto (+\$1,700)	.....32,795

