

It has always been pretty easy to tell the Subaru Forester from the Outback. At the core, this was by size—Outback was originally a tougher variant of the Legacy wagon, an offshoot of the Legacy sedan, while Forester was an offshoot of the smaller Impreza sedan (as were the WRX and WRX STi). While all have now migrated to the Subaru Global Platform (with WRX currently the only remaining sedan), this remains useful reference for that most durable Outback-Forester distinction: size.

As with Outback, Forester has had ongoing evolution of its styling along with its structure, although the two have happened at their own overlapping paces. Outback, also in this issue, has just entered its seventh generation (in 2025 as a 2026 model), arousing considerable discussion from a dedicated and highly tuned-in customer and fan base. Forester entered its sixth generation a year earlier (in 2024 as a 2025 model)—which seemed to have happened more quietly, although the relationship is now crystal clear. And it's all increasingly useful in defining the entire Subaru lineup.

Forester has always had a look of its own, notably due to its distinctive tall stature, as it was specifically invented to create more of a crossover

form (in fact, some say that term was born with this vehicle), while Outback had arguably required a more discerning eye, for as long as it and the Legacy wagon continued in parallel. Despite Forester arriving first, Subaru product planners have their own crystal ball, and it may be fair to guess that, although happening in inverse sequence, the newest Forester “follows” the even newer Outback in its considerable transformation.

Any Subaru Forester is an agile unit with surprising power beyond its numbers, in town or on the trail. Among tamer, sportier and fancier siblings, our Wilderness sample—up-specced for off-pavement emphasis, from ground clearance to tow and roof loads and more—is always a favorite.

Note that while Forester has the same powertrain in all, Outback has a more powerful (and only slightly lower-mpg) turbo in its upper trims.

Subaru Crosstrek, Forester and Outback sell in similar annual volumes in the US (about 180,000, 175,000 and 170,000 respectively in 2024, shifting to about 192,000, 175,000 and 158,000 in 2025). Slight changes could be parsed against updated styling or generational releases (Crosstrek's evolution has been more subtle to date), but all in all,



they are quite stable—restylings seeming to happen at just the right time, positioning preserved.

In the case of Forester, we had already easily adjusted to its styling, in fact appreciating it as rebalancing some of its longstanding somewhat exaggerated tall nature. But when comparing more closely with the priors (seen side-by-side, above), we can see that the form had not really changed as much as it had seemed to. Rather, an entire new front and flatter roofline have become more appropriately scaled to its proportions.

Best of all, evolution of Outback on a similar timetable has not muddled the positioning of the two, but rather clarified it—and put a new spotlight on Forester, too. Quite an achievement. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Lafayette, Indiana
ENGINE	..2.5L 4-cyl Boxer 16v, DOHC, chain-driven cams, dual active valve control syst intake/exh, alum/alum
HP/TORQUE	.....180 hp / 178 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....12.0:1
TRANSMISSION	.....Lineartronic CVT; Wilderness adds 8-spd manual mode, paddles
DRIVETRAIN	.....Symmetrical AWD X-Mode dual-mode system (snow/dirt and deep snow/mud settings) with hill descent control
SUSPENSION	...F: MacPherson-type struts; lower L-arms, coils, stblzr bar, hydraulic engine mounts R: dbl wishbone, coils, stblzr bar
STEERING	.....elec pwr assist rack & pinion (dual pinion)
BRAKES	.....F: 12.4 vented; R: 11.8 vented
WHEELS	.....17-in matte black alloy
TIRES	.....235/60 R17 102T raised white letter Yokohama Geolander all-terrain; full-size spare
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....182.9 / 104.9 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....9.3 in
APPRCH / DEPART / BRKVER	.....23.5 / 21.0 / 25.5°
TURNING CIRCLE	.....35.4 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....40.0 / 37.7 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....43.3 / 39.4 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....27.5 / 69.1 cu.ft
TOW CAPACITY	.....3500 lb
WEIGHT	.....3675 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....reg unl / 16.6 gal
MPG	.....24/28/26 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	.....\$38,385
OPTIONS PKG:	Harman Kardon speaker system, navigation, power rear gate, full digital gauge cluster
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1450
TOTAL	.....\$42,035

2026 FORESTER LINEUP

(base)	.....\$29,995
Premium	.....33,385
Sport	.....36,105
Limited	.....37,695
Wilderness	.....▼ 38,385
Touring	.....41,595

POISED AND POSITIONED

BY JOE SAGE

