

A lot of trends have been occurring industry-wide for quite some time—slight yet unremitting increases in size (most within existing categories), in many cases increases in power, in as many cases as possible increases in fuel economy, and often expansions into ever more premium territory in terms of fit, finish and features.

The new-for-2026 gen-seven Subaru Outback has created quite a stir. With what seems at first glance to be a migration into more widely typical midsize crossover styling, does it still have what it takes “to make a Subaru a Subaru”? The short answer is yes. So is the longer answer.

“It’s what makes a Subaru a Subaru” is a slogan from when Subaru was much more of a niche brand (found in numbers in New England, the Pacific Northwest and Colorado ski towns). Now the brand is huge and growing, and guess what? The slogan still works. Originally drawing attention to a quirkier standing, it now defines confidence in a widely popular brand known for content, value and reliability. Their marketers and product planners may or may not have realized the slogan would

adapt so well to evolution, but it certainly has.

The new Outback achieves our definition of the most successful new generations, a phenomenon in which a well-established vehicle receives what seems a radically new look, only to—in no time at all—become a just-as-firmly-established styling, while the prior one, which may have seemed eternal, quickly becomes the past, however popular.

Driven here is the Limited, second up out of six trims in a fairly tightly spaced price walk and bearing a 180-hp base powertrain. Half the lineup has this, the other half a 260-hp turbo, a significant difference in horses, yet with reasonably similar fuel mileage—and with overlapping price ranges.

The new Outback is a decidedly handsome vehicle, inside and out. While they do have a Wilderness build (a mid-priced turbo), even our near-base Limited carries tougher styling cues, some new, some echoing tradition—including a blacked-out grille, beefy black wheel arches, black roof rails and more—that give any trim that “ready for town and also ready for the weekend” look.

Inside baseball—for our weeklong drives, we get one build, their decision. And what it follows is completely random. These are both the opposite

of a full launch or comparo event, where we can try powertrains and features back-to-back, across the range. This lower-powertrain Outback sample arrived right on the heels of something with about twice the horsepower—and we felt it big time, at first. But by the second day, we were finding that, though not a racing powerhouse, the 180-hp base Outback had enough power to grab an open gap or make a point.

Overall, though, the power is where we would almost surely make our Outback decision. Since price ranges overlap, you’ll want to review inclusions by trim. The lower powertrain may force you upward, anyway, for features we were missing in ours. Or you just may find a win-win (more power minus features you didn’t even want). In your real world decision mission, you can compare easily.

The beloved Subaru Outback, restyled and updated, will remain beloved. You recognized the old one coming or going, and you still will. Dramatically different at first, it quickly appears inevitable and familiar. It’s really just a lane change, a turning of the page in the same book, a vehicle with such longevity, it has simply caught up with itself. And it has done so very successfully. ■

**SPECIFICATIONS**

**ASSEMBLY** .....Yajima, Shoyacho, OTA, Gunma, Japan  
**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** .....CVT w 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, dampers, stblzr bar, hydraulic engine mounts  
**R:** dbl wishbone, coils, dampers, stblzr bar  
**STEERING** .....elec pwr assist rack & pinion (dual pinion)  
**BRAKES** .....F: 12.4 vented; R: 11.8 vented  
**WHEELS** .....18-in black finish alum alloy  
**TIRES** .....225/60R18 100H all-season  
**LENGTH / WHEELBASE** .....191.7 / 108.1 in  
**GROUND CLEARANCE** .....8.7 in  
**APPRCH / DEPART / BRKVER** .....18.0 / 21.4 / 19.4°  
**TURNING CIRCLE** .....36.49 ft  
**HEADROOM (F/R)** .....40.2 / 40.5 in  
**LEGROOM (F/R)** .....43.0 / 39.5 in  
**CARGO CAPACITY** .....34.6 / 80.5 cu.ft  
**WEIGHT** .....3799 lb  
**FUEL / CAPACITY** .....reg unl / 18.0 gal  
**MPG** .....consumer site est: 25/31/na (city/hwy/comb)

**BASE PRICE** .....\$41,715  
**DESTINATION CHARGE** .....1450

**TOTAL** .....\$43,165

**2026 SUBARU OUTBACK LINEUP**

Premium	180-hp	25/31/na	\$34,995
Limited	"	"	▼ 41,715
Touring	"	"	45,395
Limited XT	260-hp turbo	21/29/na	44,365
Wilderness	"	21/27/na	44,995
Touring XT	"	21/29/na	47,995

**SUBTLE  
YET CERTAIN  
EVOLUTION**

BY JOE SAGE

