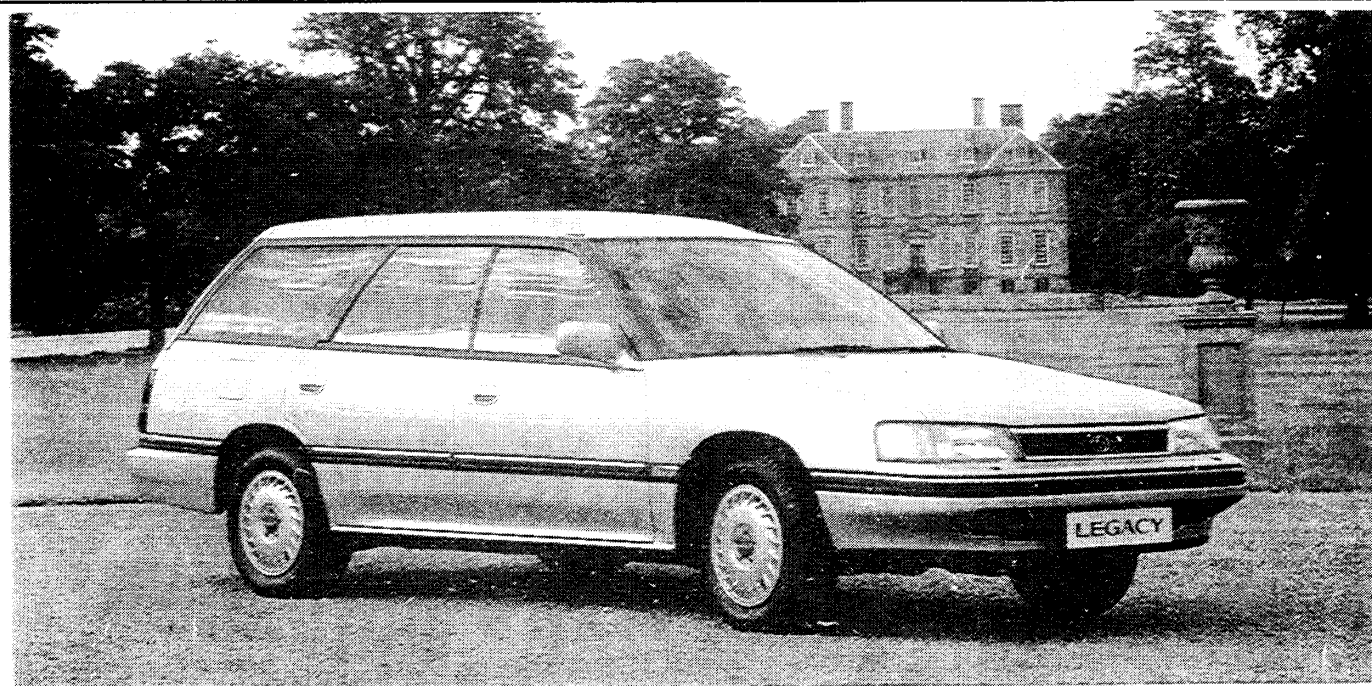


Subaru Legacy 2.2GX Estate (Automatic)



SUBARU VIRTUALLY PIONEERED THE concept of an ordinary medium saloon or estate car with four-wheel drive. The L-Series remains remarkable value for money for those who want sheer doggedness over mixed terrain, as well as a passable everyday road car. The Legacy is bigger, swifter and more svelte, but retains the 4WD concept, refined and automated. The familiar 1.8 flat-four engine continues, but there's also a more powerful 2.2 producing 130bhp.

We were impressed by the unimpaired smoothness and affability of this enlarged unit – big 'fours' are prone to vibration, but this horizontally opposed layout quells the potential imbalance and with automatic transmission as well, the Legacy is all sweetness and good nature – provided you don't touch the accelerator as you use the starter. It's lively, too, going as well in overtaking as many two-wheel drive alternatives, although its fuel consumption isn't as good.

The automatic transmission can jerk when downchanging at higher revs, but it tackles 3 to 2 downshifts up to 65mph and calculates ideal change-up points, too. There's no point in manually overriding this 'box when looking for best acceleration, in spite of the 'user-friendliness' of the selector.

The steering is pleasantly weighted, but some free-play from straight ahead dulls its handling response on the road. This is probably one of those

mechanical compromises arrived at to avoid kickback over rough ground. The same thing occurs in the suspension; the air-sprung set-up feels very unruffled at low speed over really broken surfaces, but there's some soggy heaving at higher speed on ostensibly smooth roads. What we're really describing is a car that can comfortably match a Volvo in ride and handling, but offers off-road capabilities as well.

The interior maintains its competitiveness. Beautifully trimmed in this top GX guise, everything about this Legacy's interior declares that it fully matches the luxury and comfort of ordinary estate cars that can't go off-road. It's a far cry from the rubber-matted 'clean through' Subarus of yesteryear that you valeted inside with a bucket and sponge!

On the open road, noise levels are low – despite the retention of frameless door windows there's no wind noise. Long-journey comfort from the seats, driving position and heating/ventilation is of a high order and the GX equipment reveals several valuable convenience features that we appreciated.

Interior space loses only a little to the likes of a Volvo Estate, and with the high quality trim comes a thoroughly practical load-carrying potential, aided by the familiar seat-folding arrangements. ABS braking is powerful and the interior is well padded for safety.

Depreciation on the old L-Series has been low,

Living with the Legacy . . .

even if parts and servicing costs are somewhat higher than those of popular domestic rivals.

The Legacy is Subaru's latest and best effort yet at beating the Europeans at their own game. In guises cheaper than this test car, it looks excellent value and few owners who want four-wheel drive will be able to fault the way it performs in everyday use – except perhaps when they visit the petrol pumps. It's not sporty, but combines go-anywhere determination with a surprising degree of comfort, to the point of luxury.

At the Wheel

Driving position

Although really tall people may need further rearward seat travel, height adjusters for both seat and wheel, together with massive headroom, are real assets for the lanky. Yet smaller people also feel 'in charge', and with the lumbar adjuster set firm, support is fine.

Controls and displays

The tastefully trimmed interior sticks to clear, no-nonsense dial graphics with neat pictograms. The stalks that twist as well as go up and down can feel confusing at first, but Subaru has an unerring knack of providing thoughtful little features that make you think, 'Why hasn't someone done that before?'

Vision

The Legacy's intimidating-looking bulk at the kerb gives a false impression. Excellent all-round vision through glass and mirrors is accompanied by rear extremities that can be clearly judged from the inside; the back screen is, after all, the back of the car! The electric door mirrors are painted (impractical), but fold easily out of the way (much more practical) and the driver's door window has an ideal one-shot touch facility.

The wipers, too, are state of the art, with interlinked wash-and-wipe and/or intermittent and continuous actions at the front and rear.

Space & Comfort

Seating

This Legacy Estate stands up well to comparison with popular and established, if externally bigger, holdalls, such as the big Volvo and Peugeot 505 Estates, especially in terms of seating and adaptability. Its size is cleverly pitched between these and the newer Peugeot 405 Estate, which is closer in size to the older (but still available) L-Series Subaru. The generous headroom means that the back seat cushion can be set quite high, which improves comfort.

Getting in and out

These benefit, too – less stooping and agility are required, although the rear sills are prominent; tread strips protect the paint, however, and there are rear courtesy switches and a rear roof lamp. Door pull-cum-armrests ensure easy closure and help to resist cornering side forces; no centre armrest is provided.

Luggage and oddments stowage

This is provided by a flat, impeccably trimmed and regularly shaped deck that suffers only from fairly intrusive wheelarches. The tailgate opening is a little close for comfort to tall people, but opening and closure are smooth, and there's a convenient grab recess to keep your hands clean. The 'gate is locked independently by the central locking at the driver's door only. Inside, a roller blind covers cargo when required, or it can be removed easily when bulky cargo is aboard. The back seat tilts in 60/40 fashion only on the backrest – the one-piece cushion precludes a completely flat L-shaped load floor – there's no protection in heavy braking at such times, either. Oddments spaces are thoughtful and plentiful.

Interior trim and equipment

The fabric on the doors and seats looks particularly practical and

attractive. The radio and cassette player are effective, but too complex and fiddly to work. A lined and illuminated trinket tray is a nice feature, with a capacious side-hinged box behind the gear selector.

Heating and ventilating

Not much wrong here, thanks to a supplementary ventilation button to ensure cool faces with warm feet – and that includes rear passengers. Perhaps ultimate mid-summer ventilation would be a problem, however, without a sunroof or air-conditioning – expensive options both.

Safety

Accident avoidance

The four-wheel drive facility that characterises all Subarus is not primarily a safety feature, but it does help – violent wheel spinning on street corner pullaways is as markedly absent as it is on snow or wet grass. Likewise, injudicious use of the accelerator on roundabouts doesn't induce violent changes in steering stability, so the car has been set up to feel very neutral in its cornering attitude; it goes into a gentle nose drift at the limit, with reversion almost to tail swing as you lift off.

The brakes look good, with a powerful emergency stop (sustained at any load past 30 lb) being consistently sustained by the anti-lock control – clever with four-wheel drive. The watersplash causes no qualms, and being able to raise the ride height 1½ inches adds to the driver's reassurance when wading. Fade in heavy, repetitive use is dramatically apparent with smoking pads, but recovery is prompt.

Injury prevention

The interior is impeccably padded, even behind the front seats, but the rear head restraints are hard to adjust and release, and they can't be raised sufficiently to work properly for the tall. The seatbelts work well up front and those at the rear are

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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph	0-60mph	1/4 mile
	3.4	10.7	18.3

THROUGH THE GEARS	30	40	50	60	70
		1.8	4.4	7.3	10.8

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
SPEED RANGES USING KICKDOWN		3.3	4.4	5.5	6.4

Maximum speeds

using accelerator kickdown

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	mph
	6500	6250	6400	5000	
	4	3	2	1	117
					107
					73
					39

FUEL CONSUMPTION

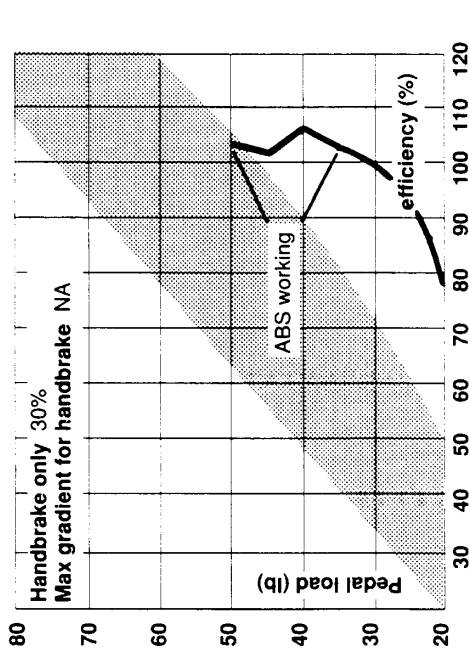
Fuel grade for tests: Unleaded Premium/95 octane

Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	22 1/2
Short journeys in the suburbs	20
Motorway – 70mph cruising	30
Brisk driving, mixed roads	25 1/2
Gentle driving – rural roads	27 1/2
Typical mpg overall	26
Realistic tank range*	52 litres/300 miles

* based on gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes How pedal loads affect braking



Fade test

How hard use or water affects braking. (Ideal brakes show no change.)

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

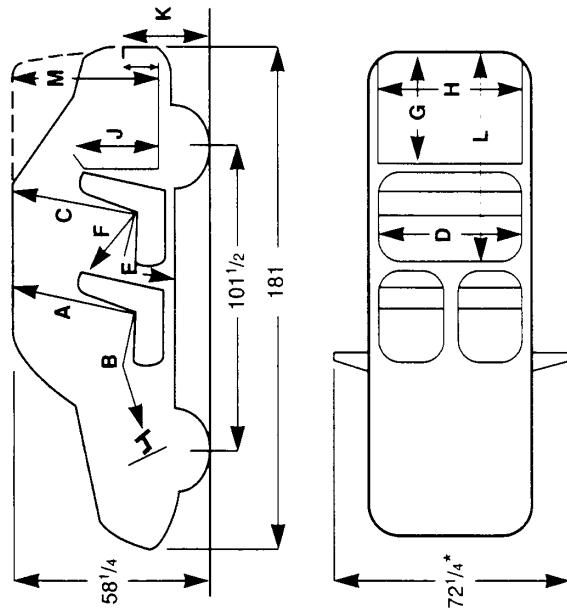
At start of test	19
After constant use	20
After severe use	32
After watersplash	20
Number of stops to recover	0

Safety check list

Steering	true 'feel' of the road?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Brakes	powerful? sensible effort? fade resistant?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Seatbelts	front – effective? convenient? rears – effective? convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Head restraints	front – effective? rear – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interior	thoroughly padded?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fuel	shielded filler? protected tank?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



* 66 1/2 with mirrors folded

Inside (inches)

A Front headroom (with sunroof)	39-40 1/2	G Load length	43
B Front legroom (min - max)	35-42 1/2	H Load floor width (min - max)	38 1/2-54
C Rear headroom	38 1/2	J Load height	17
D Back seat width (between armrests)	50 1/2	K Sill height (inner/outer)	0/22 1/2
E Typical rear legroom	40 1/2	L Load length	68
F Typical rear kneeroom	29 1/2	M Load height (to tailgate hinge)	32 1/4

* 'Typical' represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger's seat set at 41in

craftily contrived to stay clear during seat-folding operations, but they sit too high over the necks of shorter rear passengers. The centre stowage recess is hard work, too.

Money Matters

Value for money

This top-of-the-range Legacy Estate is well into Volvo 740 territory, but the 1.8 manual version is £3800 cheaper – a figure that puts it alongside upper-medium contenders like the Ford Sierra, Peugeot 405 and Vauxhall Cavalier. In fact, anyone wanting a four-wheel drive estate car isn't offered much choice – most 4WD models are available only in saloon form, which seems a bit silly. Think carefully about which Legacy will suit your needs because at current prices you pay £1300 extra for automatic transmission and £1800 more for the estate bodywork.

We think there's every prospect of the cheaper versions maintaining their value well – the old L-Series has an excellent record for low depreciation and is still, in fact, remarkably good value.

Servicing

A flat-four isn't the simplest engine to work on, but the Legacy has a very orderly underbonnet view, everything is well-finished and topping up is easy. Routine servicing is on a 7500-mile frequency (for oil and filter changing) with rather more work needed at every other visit.

Fuel economy

This automatic has a lock-up clutch to enhance efficiency and economy beyond 50mph – below this, the 'slush pump' torque converter is bad news for mpg

around the lanes, however quietly you drive. The result is better consumption on a motorway than on gentle jaunts. Refilling is easy, with a tolerance of lower octane petrol than is currently sold in the UK, and the sensible low-level lamp doesn't come on prematurely – hence a good range, despite the thirst.

Durability

Warranty terms

Careful painting and general finish are in evidence and the neat

underbonnet layout, detailed fusing and thorough mechanical specification add to the reassurance. The warranty is for 12 months/unlimited mileage on everything mechanical, plus an extra 12 months for the power train. Three chargeable inspections are needed to keep the six-year anti-rust warranty in force, and there's a nasty small-print exclusion that refers to components that are not accessible for rustproofing. Surely, it's the inaccessible bits you want most reassurance about? Also excluded is the fuel tank.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, horizontally opposed 4 cylinders; water-cooled. 96.9mm bore x 75.0mm stroke = 2212cc. All-aluminium alloy construction; 3 main bearings

Compression ratio 9.5:1

Valve gear belt-driven overhead camshafts (one per bank) actuating 4 valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel system multi-point fuel injection (integrated with ignition system) fed from 60-litre (13.2-gallon) tank with low-level warning lamp. Fuel required: leaded or unleaded, 90 octane minimum

Ignition system fully programmed electronic spark generation and timing

Max power (DIN-net) 134bhp at 6000rpm

Max torque (DIN-net) 139 lb ft at 4800rpm

TRANSMISSION

Type 5-speed manual with dual-range ratios and full-time 4WD via viscous-coupled centre differential. Optional 4-speed automatic on test car, with torque converter and

epicyclic gear set. Full-time 4WD with active torque split front to rear. Ratios: first 2.79, second 1.48, third 1.00, fourth 0.73 and reverse 2.70:1

Final drive 4.11:1 to front and rear wheels

Mph per 1000rpm (theoretical) 23.64 in top, 17.23 in 3rd

Rpm at 70mph (observed) 3000 cruising in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent MacPherson struts with integral air springs (giving self-levelling and ride height control from facia), anti-roll bar. Rear: self-levelling air springs, struts, transverse dual links, trailing arms and an anti-roll bar

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion with 3.3 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 34³/₄ft between kerbs, with 58ft for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5¹/₂ J steel with 185/70R14H tyres (Semperit Top Speed on test car)

Brakes ventilated discs front, plain discs rear (with integral drum parking brake) and vacuum servo. Bosch ABS anti-lock control standard

HOW IT COMPARES

	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	Fuel overall (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (in)	Steering + turns/circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Subaru Legacy 2.2GX Estate (Automatic)	2212/134	117	10.8	26	106/40*	42 ¹ / ₂	40 ¹ / ₂ /29 ¹ / ₂	3.3/34 ³ / ₄	181
Citroen XM 2.0Si (5-door manual)	1998/128	122	10.2	30	95/30+*	44	40 ³ / ₄ /32 ¹ / ₄	3/35 ¹ / ₄	185 ¹ / ₂
Volvo 740GLT Estate (manual)	2316/131	111	10.6	30	100/50	41 ¹ / ₄	39 ¹ / ₄ /31 ¹ / ₄	3.5/33	188 ¹ / ₂
VW Passat GT Estate (manual)†	1781/112	121	10.8	39	96/45	43	42 ¹ / ₂ /32	3.3/33	180
Vauxhall Carlton 2.0iGL Estate (manual)†	1998/120	121	11.3	33 ¹ / ₂	108/70*	42 ¹ / ₄	38 ¹ / ₂ /29	3.2/33 ¹ / ₂	186

† performance and mpg figures for saloon

* ABS fitted

+ all power-assisted