



**In the twilight of its model life, can Subaru's multi-award winning Forester fend off yet another fierce new rival?**

**S**UBARU's Forester has ruled as our Top 12 Best Buys Compact SUV champion for five years in succession. And every year it comes out tops in JD Power quality surveys all over the world. It is a fearsomely capable machine that combines quality and reliability with a fun driving experience, a comfortable cabin, reasonable economy, and the type of ride quality most luxury cars can only dream to offer. Plus, it is actually a vehicle that can stand its own ground when the going gets

rough – its permanent all-wheel drive system makes it an incredibly agile, stable and safe vehicle to drive on bad gravel roads, sand and on slippery surfaces. If you believe – as we do – that a proper compact SUV should be as good on-road as off, but not necessarily a rock hopper, then the Forester remains unbeaten.

But now another contender has arrived in the shape of Honda's brand-new CR-V. Can this newcomer finally put an end to the Forester's reign? Let's find out...

**DESIGN AND PACKAGING**

**Honda CR-V** **16/20**  
**Subaru Forester** **15/20**

Originally launched in 2002 and facelifted in 2005, the Subaru Forester has never been a yuppie-favourite, simply because it looks rather, well... like a slightly high-riding station wagon, doesn't it? It also looks lower than most of its rivals, but this appearance is misleading, because the Forester offers very competitive front and

**AT A GLANCE**

Price	R299 500
0-100 km/h (secs)	10,68
100-0 km/h (secs)	3,15
Top speed (km/h)	182
Fuel index (l/100 km)	9,96
Luggage (dm <sup>3</sup> )	336-448/1 320
Airbags	6

rear headroom. And it is actually one of the highest-riding in this class, with an impressive ground clearance of 200 mm. Its underbody is also almost completely flat, which aids its ability to traverse rough terrain. The only factor counting against its use in

# SUBARU FORESTER 2,5 XS PREMIUM

# FIGHT



## AT A GLANCE

Price	R295 000
0-100 km/h (secs)	9,81
100-0 km/h (secs)	3,47
Top speed (km/h)	188
Fuel index (ℓ/100 km)	10,95
Luggage (dm <sup>3</sup> )	344-1 264
Airbags	4

really tricky off-road situations are the large front and rear bumpers.

The Honda CR-V is a thoroughly modern design that has really polarised the CAR team. Some love its quirky styling and coupé-like side window-line, but others find the odd grille design (especially), and slightly

## NOTEBOOK



**The CR-V is an excellent cross-over, but the Forester is absolutely bullet-proof – JB**



**In the aftermath of World War Three, only cockroaches, Telkom and Subaru Foresters will survive – HO**



**As a mom's taxi, take the CR-V, but the Forester is the proper SUV – PP**

bloated rear view, off-putting. Nevertheless, the CR-V is far more likely to make the neighbours' window curtains twitch with jealousy than the Forester, as it appears to

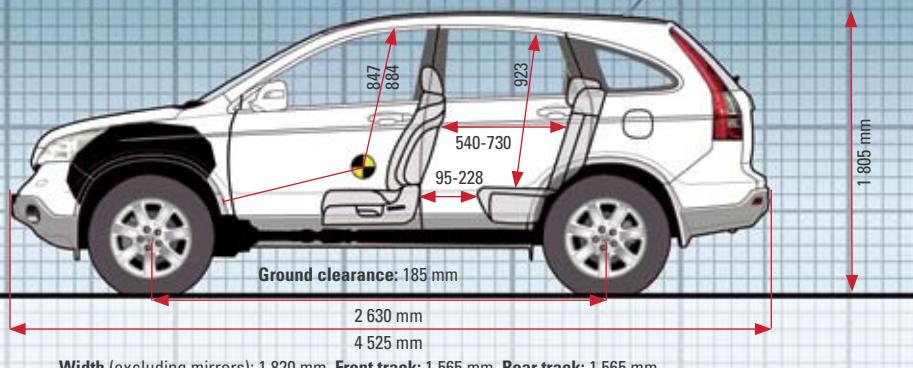


**CR-V is arguably more car for the money, but I'd buy the purpose-built Scooby – SM**



**Honda will have broader appeal, but I'd buy the Forester: it's more manly – IM**

Denotes hip point of 1,8 m adult



Width (excluding mirrors): 1 820 mm Front track: 1 565 mm Rear track: 1 565 mm

## SPECIFICATIONS

**ENGINE:**  
Cylinders four in-line, transverse  
Fuel supply electronic injection  
Bore/stroke 81/69,9 mm  
Cubic capacity 1 997 cm<sup>3</sup>  
Compression ratio 10,5 to 1  
Valvegear s-o-h-c, four valves per cylinder, i-VTEC

### ENGINE OUTPUT:

Max power ISO (kW) 110  
Power peak (r/min) 6 200  
Red line (r/min) 6 700  
Max torque (N.m) 190  
Torque peak (r/min) 4 200

### TRANSMISSION:

Forward speeds six  
Low gear 3,642 to 1  
2nd gear 1,880 to 1

3rd gear 1,212 to 1  
4th gear 0,972 to 1  
5th gear 0,780 to 1  
Top gear 0,659 to 1  
Reverse gear 3,583 to 1  
Final drive 5,333 to 1  
Drive wheels two-four-wheel drive  
Driver aids -  
Driver aids -

### WHEELS AND TYRES:

Road wheels 17x6,5J alloy  
Tyre make Bridgestone Dueler H/T  
Tyre size 225/65 R17  
Spare - type and location full size, under boot floor

### WHEELS AND TYRES:

Front 296 mm ventilated discs  
Rear 305 mm solid discs  
Hydraulics ABS, EBD

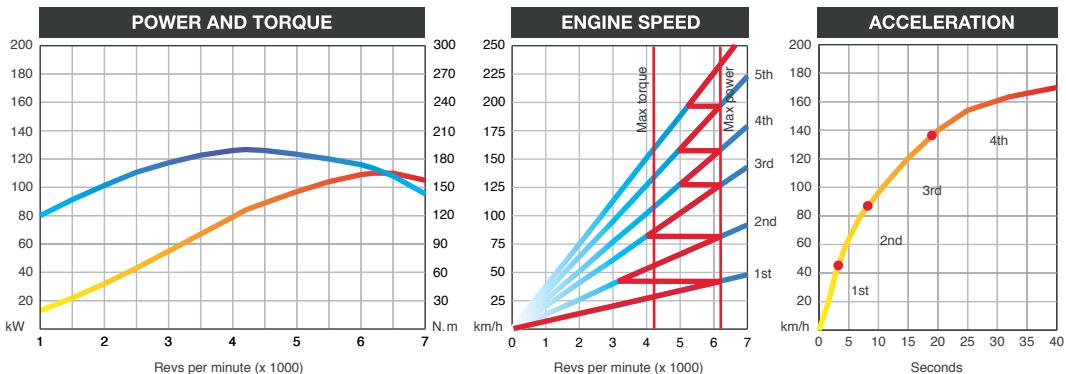
**STEERING:**  
Type rack and pinion, power-assisted  
Lock to lock 3,0 turns  
Turning circle 11,2 metres  
**SUSPENSION**  
Front MacPherson struts, toe-control link, stabiliser bar  
Rear double wishbones, reactive link, stabiliser bar

### CAPACITIES:

Seating 5  
Fuel tank 58 litres  
Boot/utility space 336-448/1 320 dm<sup>3</sup>

### WARRANTY AND SERVICE INTERVALS:

3 years/100 000 km warranty  
5 years/100 000 km service plan  
1 year roadside assistance  
Service every 15 000 km



## TEST RESULTS

### MAXIMUM SPEED (km/h):

True speed 182 at 5 720 r/min in 5th gear  
Speedometer reading 189  
(Average of runs both ways on a level road)  
Calibration: 60 80 100 120  
True speed: 57 77 96 115  
Odometer error 0,25 per cent over

### ACCELERATION (seconds):

0-60 4,54  
0-80 6,97  
0-100 10,68  
0-120 14,89  
1 km sprint 31,94  
Terminal speed 163,4 km/h

### OVERTAKING ACCELERATION (seconds):

	3rd	4th	5th	Top
40-60	3,99	5,62	8,21	9,36
60-80	4,03	5,34	7,84	9,05
80-100	4,13	5,93	8,02	10,36
100-120	4,75	6,19	9,86	11,29
120-140	-	7,56	10,58	13,02

(Calculated at engine power peak\* - 6 200 r/min and at red line - 6 700 r/min.)

### FUEL CONSUMPTION:

\*Fuel index 9,96 litres/100 km  
10,04 km/litre  
Estimated tank range 582 km  
(\*Calculated overall consumption)

### BRAKING TEST:

From 100 km/h  
Best/worst stop 3,07/3,21  
Average of 10 stops/rating 3,15/poor  
(Measured in seconds with stops from true speeds at 30-second intervals on a good bitumenised surface.)

### GEARED SPEEDS (km/h):

Low gear 42\* 46  
2nd gear 82\* 88  
3rd gear 127\* 137  
4th gear 159\* 171  
5th gear 197\* 213  
Top gear 234\* 252  
(Calculated at engine power peak\* - 6 200 r/min and at red line - 6 700 r/min.)

### INTERIOR NOISE LEVELS (dB, A-weighted):

Idle 34  
120 km/h 67

### PERFORMANCE FACTORS:

Power/mass (W/kg) 70  
Power/litre (kW/litre) 55  
Torque/litre (N.m/litre) 95  
Frontal area (m<sup>2</sup>) 3,77

Drag coefficient (Cd) n/a  
km/h per 1 000 r/min (top) 37,7

Revs/km 1 592  
Mass as tested (kg) 1 580

Front/rear weight distribution (%) 55/45  
(Calculated on "mass as tested", gross frontal area, gearing and ISO power output)

### TEST CONDITIONS:

Altitude at sea level  
Weather overcast, mild  
Test car's odometer 2 864

be the bigger, more expensive of the two. The CR-V is, in fact, longer, wider and higher, and also has a longer wheelbase, which gives it a more spacious cabin. It features a rear bench that can slide forwards or rearward by around 130 mm, allowing luggage space and rear legroom to be tailored to the user's needs. This means it has more usable rear legroom, and also a bigger boot (when the rear seats are moved forward). Total utility space is also slightly larger than in the Forester - 336-448/1 320 dm<sup>3</sup> for the Honda, and 344/1 264 dm<sup>3</sup> for the Subaru. Both vehicles have full-size spare wheels under their boot floors.

From behind the steering wheel, the Honda is clearly the more modern vehicle, with smart instrumentation incorporating a neat multi-function display (something sorely lacking in the Subaru). The Subaru's facia, on the other hand, is ergonomically excellent, but urgently in need of some design flair.

Both Honda and Subaru have built reputations as makers of quality cars, so it came as no surprise to find that both our test vehicles appeared very solidly screwed together. Cheapish plastics are used here and there on both vehicles, but both also manage to disguise them well. Having run a Forester in our long-term fleet two years ago, we can also vouch for the durability of the Subaru's fittings.

## COMFORT AND FEATURES

**Honda CR-V**  
**Subaru Forester**

16/20  
15/20

The Forester used for illustrative purposes on these pages is the lower-spec 2,5 XS model, but the mechanically identical, higher-spec Premium variant is used for comparison with the CR-V RVSi, seeing as they are priced within spitting distance of each other.

Both vehicles offer climate control, cruise control, electric windows and mirrors all round (folding on the CR-V), power steering, ABS with EBD, hill-hold, electric sunroof, remote central unlocking, and child seat anchors. The CR-V has curtain airbags (in addition to the dual front and side 'bags shared with the Forester), auto-on headlamps and wipers, remote audio controls on the steering wheel, and electric adjustment for the driver's seat (manual on the Forester). The Forester hits back with a 6-disc CD changer (single front loader on the

CR-V), self-leveelling rear suspension, and a low-range transfer case – as many serious SUV enthusiasts will tell you, no SUV is complete without low-range.

So, spec-wise, there is not really that much to choose between the two – but look closer and the CR-V does offer some more modern packaging solutions – it has a double cubby, for example, and then there is also that previously mentioned sliding rear bench, as well as a neat folding boot board that can be used to split the load bay into two levels. The CR-V also has a large storage box between the seats.

But easily the CR-V's biggest advantage over the Forester is its extra – and variable – rear legroom. By comparison, the Forester feels quite cramped at the rear, although there is ample foot space, and headroom is actually better than in the Honda.

## RIDE, HANDLING AND BRAKING

**Honda CR-V** **15/20**  
**Subaru Forester** **17/20**

Honda's new CR-V rides on a MacPherson strut front, and reactive link double wishbone rear suspension set-up. Anti-roll bars are fitted at both ends. The CR-V's wider track, standard 17-inch wheels and 35 mm lower centre of gravity are all efforts to make it handle less like an SUV, and more like a family saloon. For the most part, the effort has been worth it – new CR-V exhibits very little cornering body roll, and generally rides like a big station wagon. In fact, from behind the wheel, it actually feels like an MPV – which is probably what the market wants, seeing as so many of these vehicles are typically used for the school run...

The improved on-road handling, however, has arguably come at the cost of some gravel road ability. Besides the fact that the ride height is an unimpressive 185 mm, the stiffer suspension (compared with the Forester), make the Honda feel less comfortable on poor or gravel road surfaces.

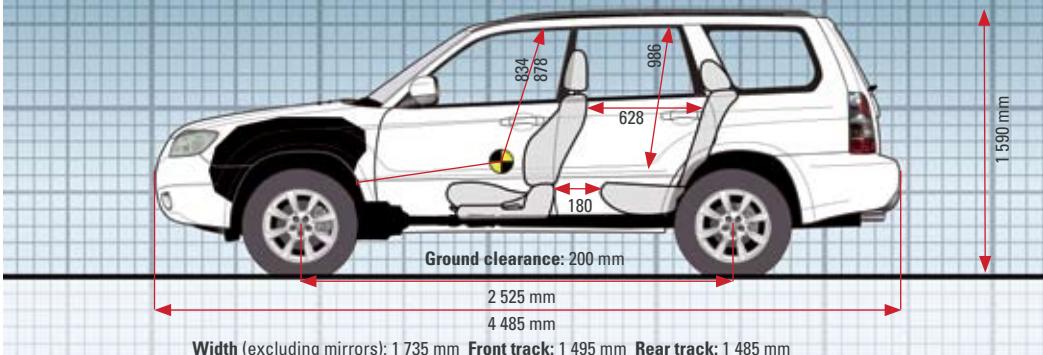
By contrast with the Subaru's permanent all-wheel drive system, the CR-V has a "real time" four-wheel drive set-up that sees it running in front-wheel drive most of the time, with improved fuel economy claimed as a benefit. When the CR-V's system detects that the front wheels are losing grip, it immediately transfers torque to the rear wheels.

## SUBARU FORESTER 2.5 XS PREMIUM

car TEST SCORE

16/20

Denotes hip point of 1.8 m adult



## SPECIFICATIONS

### ENGINE:

Cylinders four, horizontally-opposed  
Fuel supply multi-point, sequential injection  
Bore/stroke 99,5/79 mm  
Cubic capacity 2 457 cm<sup>3</sup>  
Compression ratio 10 to 1  
Valve gear s-o-h-c, four valves per cylinder

### ENGINE OUTPUT:

Max power ISO (kW) 121  
Power peak (r/min) 5 600  
Red line (r/min) 6 200  
Max torque (N.m) 225  
Torque peak (r/min) 4 400

### TRANSMISSION:

Forward speeds five  
Low gear 3,454 to 1  
2nd gear 2,062 to 1  
3rd gear 1,448 to 1

### 4th gear

1,088 to 1

### Top gear

0,780 to 1

### Reverse gear

3,333 to 1

### Final drive

4,111 to 1

### Reduction gear

1,196 to 1

### Drive wheels

permanent all-wheel drive

### Driver aids

-

### WHEELS AND TYRES:

Road wheels 16x6,5JJ alloy  
Tyre make Yokohama Geolander G900  
Tyre size 215/60 R16  
Spare – type and location full size on steel, under boot board

### BRAKES:

Front 294 mm ventilated discs  
Rear 266 mm solid discs  
Hydraulics ABS, EBD

### STEERING:

Type rack and pinion, power-assisted  
Lock to lock 3,0 turns

Turning circle 10,6 metres

### SUSPENSION

Front MacPherson struts  
Rear multi-link

### CAPACITIES:

Seating 5  
Fuel tank 60 litres

Boot/utility space 344-1 264 dm<sup>3</sup>

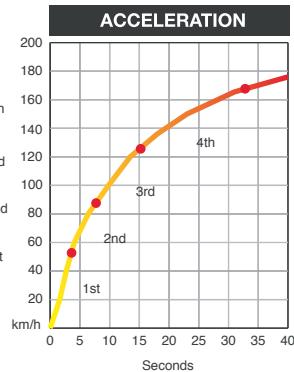
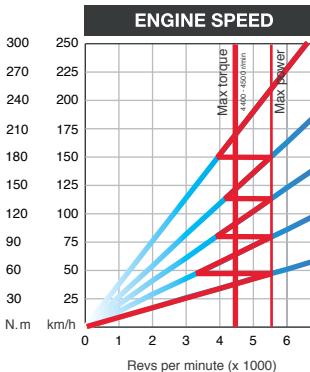
### WARRANTY AND SERVICE INTERVALS:

3 years/ 100 000 km warranty

3 years/63 000 km maintenance plan

Subaru Assist

Service every 12 500 km



## TEST RESULTS

### MAXIMUM SPEED (km/h):

True speed 188 at 4 950 r/min in top gear

Speedometer reading 202

(Average of runs both ways on a level road)

Calibration: 60 80 100 120

True speed: 55 75 93 111

Odometer error 1,64 per cent over over

### ACCELERATION (seconds):

0-60 4,05

0-80 6,39

0-100 9,81

0-120 13,46

1 km sprint 30,94

Terminal speed 165,5 km/h

### OVERTAKING ACCELERATION (seconds):

3rd 5,55 5,38 9,43

4th 3,41 5,14 8,83

Top 3,57 5,18 9,59

100-120 4,10 5,53 10,49

120-140 – 6,60 14,25

### FUEL CONSUMPTION:

\*Fuel index 10,95 litres/100 km

9,13 km/litre

Estimated tank range 548 km

(\*Calculated overall consumption)

### BRAKING TEST:

From 100 km/h

Best/worst stop 3,34/3,56

Average of 10 stops/rating 3,47/poor

(Measured in seconds with stops from true

speeds at 30-second intervals on a good

bitumenised surface.)

### GEARED SPEEDS (km/h):

Low gear 48\* 53

2nd gear 81\* 89

3rd gear 115\* 127

4th gear 153\* 169

Top gear 213\* 236

(Calculated at engine power peak\* – 5 600 r/min

and at red line – 6 200 r/min.)

### INTERIOR NOISE LEVELS (dB, A-weighted):

Idle 42

120 km/h 70

### PERFORMANCE FACTORS:

Power/mass (W/kg) 84

Power/litre (kW/litre) 49

Torque/litre (N.m/litre) 92

Frontal area (m<sup>2</sup>) 2,76

Drag coefficient (Cd) n/a

km/h per 1 000 r/min (top) 38,0

Revs/km 1 578

Mass as tested (kg) 1 445

Front/rear weight distribution (%) 57/43

(Calculated on "mass as tested", gross frontal

area, gearing and ISO power output)

### TEST CONDITIONS:

Altitude at sea level

Weather mild, windy

Test car's odometer 865



SUBARU FORESTER



HONDA CR-V



**CR-V has the more modern, feature-filled facia, whereas the Forester's is more straightforward. Both cars' interiors have plenty of shiny plastic, but are well screwed together.**

Compared with its predecessor, up to 20 per cent more torque is moved to the rear. We still found it rather amusing when, during performance testing, the CR-V spun its front wheels like a hot hatch possessed...

By comparison, the Forester is the more "proper" SUV. It rides on a modified Impreza platform, with MacPherson struts in front and a multi-link set-up at the rear. The all-wheel drive system divides torque equally between the two axles under normal driving conditions, but a central viscous differential will send drive to the axle with more grip, if the other is slipping. This gives the Forester tremendous grip and stability even under normal road conditions, and imparts a feeling of confidence to the driver that few vehicles in this segment can match. With its more direct steering (the CR-V's electric power steering feels a bit over-assisted), the Forester is the vehicle that "connects" with its driver – we are sure the driving enthusiast will always go the Forester route.

But, arguably, the Forester's greatest talent is that you don't need to be a rally wannabe to enjoy its dynamic talents, because it boasts such superb ride quality, and awe-inspiring dirt road capability. To put it simply, it treats road imperfections and rutted gravel roads with disdain. And when the going gets

trickier, and the speeds lower, there is always the higher ground clearance, permanent all-wheel drive, and low-range 'box to get you out of trouble. For the buyer who will actually use his/her vehicle for recreational purposes off the beaten track, the Forester is the clear winner.

Both vehicles achieved braking times that fall into the "poor" rating parameters of our strict emergency brake testing routine. However, their stopping times (3,15 sec for the CR-V, and 3,47 for the Forester) are about on par for this type of vehicle. The times were also achieved consistently, and without fade.

#### PERFORMANCE

**Honda CR-V 13/20**  
**Subaru Forester 16/20**

The CR-V is powered by a new s-o-h-c, 2,0-litre i-VTEC version of the 1,8-litre engine found in the Civic. It delivers 110 kW at 6 200 r/min and 190 N.m of torque at 4 200. A six-speed manual gearbox is fitted. Weighing just under 1,6 tons as tested, the CR-V's power/weight ratio of 70 W/kg is nothing to write home about. But to be fair, its 0-100-km/h time of 10,68 seconds and 182 km/h top speed is perfectly fine for this type of vehicle... until you drive the Forester.

The Scooby is powered by a 2,5-litre flat-four pumping out 121 kW at 5 600 r/min and 225 N.m

at 4 400. The extra oomph, slightly lower weight, and better traction make the Forester a fair bit quicker off the mark. Our test unit had less than 800 km on the odo when we did our performance testing, yet clocked a 0-100 km/h best of 9,81 seconds and a 188 km/h top speed. Previous Foresters (with more kays) have been even faster. The overtaking acceleration times appear slightly confusing, because the Forester has one gear less but, generally speaking, it pulls more strongly than the CR-V.

From behind the wheel, this translates into the Forester feeling more responsive to throttle inputs, and it is more flexible in third and fourth, so there's less need to stir the gearbox. With the six-speed Honda it is more regularly required to change down a gear or two to get the necessary momentum.

#### FUEL ECONOMY

**Honda CR-V 17/20**  
**Subaru Forester 14/20**

With its larger capacity engine, the Forester was never going to match the economy of the Honda's advanced i-VTEC unit. The CR-V achieved a calculated fuel index figure of 9,96 litres/100 km, translating to range of 582 km on the 58-litre tank. The Subaru's fuel index figure is 10,95 litres/100 km, which gives it a range of 548 km.

#### VALUE FOR MONEY

**Honda CR-V 16/20**  
**Subaru Forester 14/20**

With its longer service plan (5 years/100 000 km), the R299 500 CR-V is immediately off to a good start in this category. It is also the more economical, and because of wider market acceptance of the Honda badge, is also likely to have a better resale value.

The R295 000 Forester has a 3 years/63 000 km service plan, which can be extended at extra cost. Neither of these vehicles should give their owners much grief in terms of reliability, and both manufacturers have excellent reputations for after-sales service. Although the Forester is the most popular model in the Subaru line-up, and the make's best performer in terms of resale value too, it is still unlikely to match the Honda CR-V in this regard.

#### VERDICT

**Honda CR-V 16/20**  
**Subaru Forester 16/20**

So, the Honda CR-V is more economical, offers more space in a more cleverly packaged cabin, and is likely to be the wiser investment, come trade-in time. Does that make it our new compact SUV champion? Not quite...

Although we've given the same score to both, these are very different vehicles. Which one is best for you will depend entirely on how you intend using it. The Honda's strengths make it a brilliant (if slightly underpowered) family car. In fact, most of CAR's testers see it as crossover that, probably in line with how buyers are actually using vehicles in this segment, verges more towards the MPV camp.

By contrast, the Forester sticks far more rigorously to the original definition of a compact SUV. What the Subaru does better than any other vehicle in the so-called SUV segment is its ability to show that superb dirt- and rough-road ability do not need to come at the expense of brilliant on-road dynamics. This is a car that you'll enjoy driving, whatever the conditions. We recognise the brilliant Honda as the car the market wants, but, for us, the Subaru still defines the term *compact Sport-Utility Vehicle*.