Subaru Forester – Road Test

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Subaru's Forester E-Boxer, 2.0XE Premium Lineartronic is watching you...

By Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

Some car-makers shout about their success in your face but Subaru doesn't need to because the all-new Forester e-Boxer 2.0XE Premium Lineartronic actually watches your face.

Facial recognition is fitted to the instruments to ensure the driver's eyes concentrate on the road ahead and this combined with a suite of safety features using exterior cameras and sensors to keep the car on course and out of danger has won it much praise and a few

awards.

The acclamation for the Forester continues with its electrically assisted four-wheel-drivetrain and roadholding as well as its general fresh approach to the modern SUV concept.



Because Subaru is really a small player in the UK market its Forester SUV probably doesn’t get the recognition it deserves except among country dwellers, farmers and sporting drivers who want grip and dependability.

The Subaru Forester range has a long pedigree and today comprises nine models split between petrol or diesel versions and a handful of trim specifications with manual or automatic transmission, but all with 4WD.

Our Forester e-Boxer 2.0XE Premium Lineartronic is not only the top of the SUV range but also the most expensive car in the Subaru range. It is bristling with passive and dynamic safety features and is trimmed in leather with bright detailing and provides all you'd expect in an executive model in terms of comfort.

The latest Forester e-Boxer uses a new flat and horizontally opposed four-cylinder engine fitted with a mild electric motor to reduce emissions while increasing refinement and power. It drives through an improved symmetrical all-wheel-drive transmission which can now better perform in sand or deep mud, and that's all done through a rotary control just behind the automatic's selection lever on the central console.



The installation means the Forester e-Boxer 2.0XE is extremely silent when moving off, pulls well under throttle and has good economy potential. The automatic CVT ensures the system is very smooth and effortless under hand and you cannot tell when the ev tails off as the petrol engine takes over, so smooth and refined is the transition.

With the permanent intelligent 4WD and low-slung powertrain and traction battery the roadholding is very good, and its handling is confidence-inspiring once you get used to the insensitive steering.

It’s a fairly big car offering plenty of space for just five in terms of leg, shoulder and elbow

room but that also detracts from its nimbleness and the absolute power available is not extremely high so its acceleration and overtaking ability is not as good as with some other executive cars.

I also found it rolled around corners due to its soft springing and suspension layout and the lack of two more seats will turn off some buyers. That said, the boot capacity is very good with the rear seats in use, and they can be dropped with a remote release close to the open fifth door so you can triple the volume.

It’s easy to load the back of the Forester 2.0XE Premium because it has a power operated door to open or close, the loadbed is about knee-height and very well shaped with useful twin hooks either side and some further small spaces beneath, along with the emergency kit and traction battery.



Getting into the rear and front seats is simple too. Although an SUV, the floorpan is not much higher than a conventional executive car and even an 89-year-old passenger we used to test the access made no complaint. Once seated the low waistline and deep windows gave excellent vision to sides, front and back, backed up by nearside and reversing cameras. Blindspots are very limited and the big wipers, powerful washers both ends, tracking bright headlights and sensible courtesy lights are appreciated.

The seats were leather trimmed in this top model, big, very well shaped to support occupants and there was good adjustment range in front. They absorbed the few road bumps which got past the suspension and overall the Forester's ride was extremely smooth.

For the driver the controls are generally well laid out close to hands, such as the paddles for manually making the most of the transmission, although some were hidden behind or low on the fascia. The big infotainment screen and system was slow operating, looked dated and was not particularly user-friendly in setting up the hands-free phone.

Heating and ventilation was comprehensive (and it's worth mentioning four heated seats were fitted), with good output, directional control and quick-reacting settings. Powered windows and a big sunroof with a shade added to the convenience and comfort for everyone and there was a heated steering wheel for winter comfort.

Looking into the fascia the main instruments were not large but clearly marked and included a selectable display for essential data which was also backed up on a dashtop binnacle carrying more details on journeys and safety settings. We certainly felt very looked after inside the Forester.

Oddments space was good for a family car with door bins throughout, seat pockets in the back and deep glovebox, console trays and a cubby-box in front.

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The refinement of the Subaru was emphasised by its overall low noise levels. Starting up

and pulling away it was particularly quiet, it became more obvious as engine revs increased and there were some road rumblings but these were modest as was the wind noise. It was particularly quiet at the legal maximum on the motorway.

At the end of our week-long test we achieved an overall fuel consumption of 38 mpg but at times it was heading towards 40 mpg in light traffic at non-motorway speed.




FORESTER



Safety functions explained

If the driver looks out of the window or across at a passenger for an extended period of time, the safety system will recognise that the face direction is not forward and a warning will sound to alert the driver to focus on the road ahead.

The system will also function if it identifies that the driver is drowsy. Facial recognition technology monitors that the driver's eyes are open and will alert the driver if they frequently or continuously close their eyes.

The system can even mute the audio to ensure that full attention is given to the warning sound. Warnings will only occur while driving and the system will not alert the driver when stopped or when the indicator is on.

However, on a bright day and wearing sunglasses, we noticed the system appeared confused and couldn't see the driver's eyes, so it continually flashed warnings to keep eyes focused ahead. There's none so blind as cannot see it seems, even if it's a car.

VERDICT

The Subaru Forester e-Boxer 2.0XE Premium Lineartronic is an impressive car on many fronts, namely its dynamic refinement and practicality, but the five-seat only configuration may not suit every potential buyer.

For: Roomy, very comfortable, extremely quiet and smooth, excellent gearbox, fair economy, simple driving mode change, good ground clearance, plenty of oddments space, excellent visibility, facial recognition safety features and good warranty.

Against: Poor connectivity and fiddly radio, modest performance, some hidden switchgear, body roll and vague steering, just five seats.



Mini Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Subaru Forester e-Boxer 2.0XE Premium Lineartronic, large 4WD SUV.

Price: *£39,335.*

Mechanical: 150 hp, four cylinder, 2.0 litre, petrol/mild hybrid with lithium-ion battery, CVT, 4WD.

Performance: 119 mph, 0–62 mph 11.8 seconds, Combined Cycle 43.5 mpg (38 mpg on test), CO2 168 g/km.

Tax costs: VED First year road tax £530, Standard rate £140, BiK company car tax 36%.

Insurance Group: 21P.

Warranty: Five years/100,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4.61 m (15.12 ft), W 1.80 m (5.91 ft), H 1.74 m (5.71 ft), boot/load space 505 – 1,557 litres (17.83 – 54.98 cu.ft), braked towing weight 2,000 kg (4,409 lb), five doors/five seats.