Subaru Outback 2.5ES – Road Test

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Author:

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Robin Roberts joins the country set test driving the Subaru Outback 2.5ES Touring. Here Robin (and Miles Better News Agency) reports from autumnal leafy, mud-covered lanes…

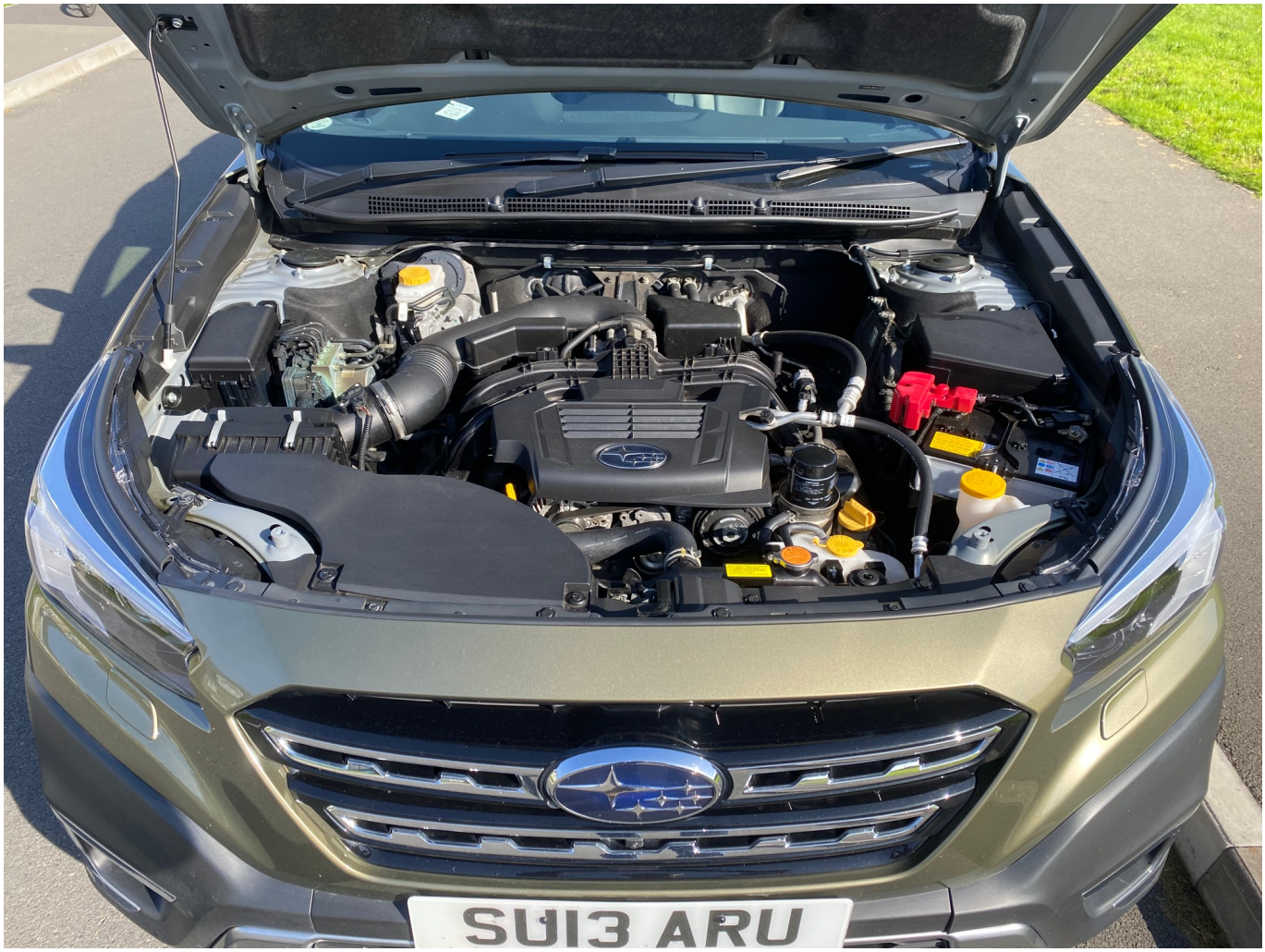
Subaru is a bit of a lone-wolf in the car world. It’s part of Fuji Heavy Industries and founded 70 years ago. The brand celebrates its golden anniversary in Britain next year after it launched with a compact and capable little estate car and pick-ups at prices which made hundreds of farmers and country-folk very happy.

Subaru also became a byword for British fans of the World Rally Championship in the 80s and 90s but few can remember its single-season shot in the rarefied ranks of Formula One.

Not the obvious choice for many looking for a big estate, the 4-wheel drive Subaru Outback easily undercuts similar sized rivals and delivers a very high specification along with a really strong ability on wintry roads and some off-road tracks.

The Porsche-like flat-four-cylinder petrol engine is strong and low-slung in the chassis and matched with front struts and rear wishbone suspension it actually handles very well.

In fact it could take much more power than the 162 PS produced by the 2.5 litre capacity engine and this would widen its appeal. As it sits, the engine is a bit lacking in oomph and economy is not great, which is possibly not surprising because the eight-speed CVT is heavy and prone to frequent changes in everyday driving plus at times it drives four wheels through its on-demand AWD system.



The latest Outback range comprised just three models, Limited, Field and Touring from £36,990, £40,990 and £42,490 with the only option a £595 special paint finish.

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Our Touring top-line model was very well specified with eight-speed cvt, intelligent headlights, sunroof and four electric windows, nappa leather powered front and heated seats throughout, powered tailgate, 11.6-inch infotainment screen, wireless connectivity,

dynamic driving assistance systems, tiredness monitor and facial recognition for comfort settings.

Starting was instant, it pulled steadily and cruised easily on main roads and motorways

while venturing onto B-class roads meant the transmission had to work harder and sapped fuel economy.

The seamless changes up or down were silent and you can select intelligent or sporting modes to maximise potential as desired.

The steering was really well balanced between power and precision, action and assistance and the turning circle was not too big in urban areas or when parking. We liked the feel through the pedal slowing and stopping the Outback quickly and without drama but found the parking brake release was not smooth.

Our main constant irritation were the indicators which had a neat short action overtaking flick facility but prolonged use when turning did not seem to end with any self-cancellation and they had to be manually reset every time.

Wipers and washers were by contrast very effective both ends of the car and the headlights must be among the brightest long range and wide-spread beams of any car on sale today, excellent for night use.

Visibility was very good with a high seating position, low waistline to windows and slim door and roof pillars, a screened sunroof, and excellent powerful heating and ventilation for demisting.

Oddments room was good for a family car, the bootspace really useful even with five-seats in use and it could be quickly tripled folding down the offset split seatbacks and removing the luggage cover roller.

Doors opened wide for occupants and the powered tailgate rose from knee-height to a good height and it closed on the key as well if you could not reach the button to shut it.

Inside the five seats all had really good legroom, shoulder space and head height and they were well shaped to support under the thighs for those infront and wrapped around for

some spirited driving. Nappa covering was sensible for easy cleaning and looked good. The front pair have powered adjustment and the driver's seat has memory settings while those behind can manually recline their seats for added comfort.

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There are power points and USB ports throughout to emphasise the family friendly design and the big infotainment screen resembles a tablet laptop with a very good sound system to appreciate.

It is, however, a very squashed touchscreen and a user can easily accidentally hit a feature they did not intend to use and with so much put into that it becomes a major distraction when driving.

Certainly, the eye-sight monitor doesn't like a driver looking away from straight-ahead for more than a couple of seconds and it adds a visual reminder and sound.

It's part of a facial recognition system which works for up to five drivers and once detected the computer resets secondary controls to their chosen settings from log-in. Very clever.

The essential dials for speed, engine performance, and levels are big and clear, split by a selectable info panel.

On the move, the Subaru Outback has reasonable performance but it's not sporty in a straight line yet its abilities are well contained by the suspension and chassis.

Roadholding is very good, cornering drama-free and it soaked up bumps and potholes without complaint.

The driver aids operate smoothly in the background most of the time and it has an excellent

reversing camera and parking sensors.

VERDICT

Subaru is the sleeping giant in UK showrooms, a brand for individuals who not only dare to be different but want the Outback to meet particular needs with consummate ability and comfort.

For: Very roomy and comfortable, good soft off-road ability and seamless powertrain take-up, very highly equipped, reasonable economy and great handling.

Against: Average performance and noisy engine under load, modest power for weight and size, very fussy infotainment touchscreen, expensive tax costs, unremarkable warranty.

FAST FACTS

Model: Subaru Outback 2.5ES Touring

Price: £42,490

Mechanical: 162 PS flat-4 cyl 2.5 litre petrol engine, 8 speed CVT, AWD

Max Speed: 120 mph

0 – 62 mph: 10.2sec

Combined MPG: 36.9

Insurance Group: 30

CO2 emissions: 193 g/km

Tax costs: BiK rating 37%, VED £1,565FY, £570SRx5-years

Warranty: 3 years/ 60,000 miles

Size: L 4.87 m (15.98 ft), W 1.88 m (6.17 ft), H 1.68 m (5.51 ft)

Bootspace: 561 to 1,822 litres (19.81 to 64.34 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 1,674 kg (3,691 lb)