Subaru Outback 2.5ES Touring – Road Test

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Robin Roberts (and WheelsWithinWales) test drives Subaru's Outback 2.5ES, in range-topping 'Touring' form.

When the going gets tough, so it's said, the tough get going and the Subaru Outback will

probably lead the way for most drivers.

It mayn't be an obvious choice because it does not look like a classic big-wheeled off-roader with enough space around the wheel arches to coral a sheep, or two.

Nor does it have a slab-sided body and brick-like profile which can turn a practical car into a poor looking car.

But it does have a discerning ability to take just about everything in its stride and deliver the driver and passengers in utter comfort to their desired destination.



Subaru's has just passed its 70th anniversary since a group of Japanese engineering companies came together to pool resources and build cars after WW2. They adopted the Pleiades star constellation as their badge as this comes together and is known as Subaru in Japanese and means 'unite'.

Farmers and country folk have long appreciated the Subaru brand since it launched in the UK with a comparatively small pick up and practical estate in 1974 – 50 years ago this year – after Robert Edmiston started importing them with his pay-out from Jensen Motors, where he was finance director, in the Midlands.

Subaru's patented boxer engine and symmetrical all-wheel-drive has been the backbone of the brand over the decades and provides excellent on-road handling combined with great off-road ability when needed. No wonder farmers love them.



This year, the Subaru Outback was crowned the Best Crossover 4×4 by the Overlander magazine, having won the Best Crossover Estate in 2023 as well.

We tested the same model last year and were impressed, so eagerly jumped at an opportunity to refresh ourselves with this capable all-rounder after it won the Overlander award.

It is impressive if you can live with the fuel consumption and arguably the most irritating indicators on any current car. Touch it and it flashes lights a few times to overtake or pull in, but hold it down and the system does not self cancel as most do and it has be turned off.

The current model is extremely well specified with features as well as having an all wheel drive system which copes with mud and snow without slipping or sliding about.

The powertrain is strong, changes were smooth up or down, it steered faithfully and with little driver effort, slowed and stopped with reassuring precision and the parking brake was very good on a steep slope. Different drive modes meant you could make the most of the economy or performance from the big engine, but the frequent changes did push down the economy.

Not only did it handle well but it was really comfortable for a big 4×4 which has to cope with a wide range of loadings.

The 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.

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.

Wipers and washers were effective and the headlights are among the brightest long range and wide-spread beams of any car.

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 by 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.

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.

Despite being over 11-inches wide, the touchscreen was packed and a user could 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.

The software system includes facial recognition and once programmed the set up will automatically adjust to them for individual drivers.

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

The Subaru Outback Touring is a very good package at this price.

For: Roomy and comfortable, seamless powertrain take-up, highly equipped, reasonable economy and great handling.

Against: Average performance and noisy when pressed, very fussy infotainment touchscreen, expensive to tax, average warranty.



FAST FACTS

Model: Subaru Outback 2.5 Touring

Price: £42,490

Mechanical: 160 PS flat-4 cyl 2.5 litre petrol engine, 8 speed CVT, AWD

Max Speed: 120 mph

0 – 62 mph: 10.2 sec

Combined MPG: 36.9

Insurance Group: 30

C02 emissions: 193 g/km

Bik rating: 37%, £1,565FY, £570SRx5

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)

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