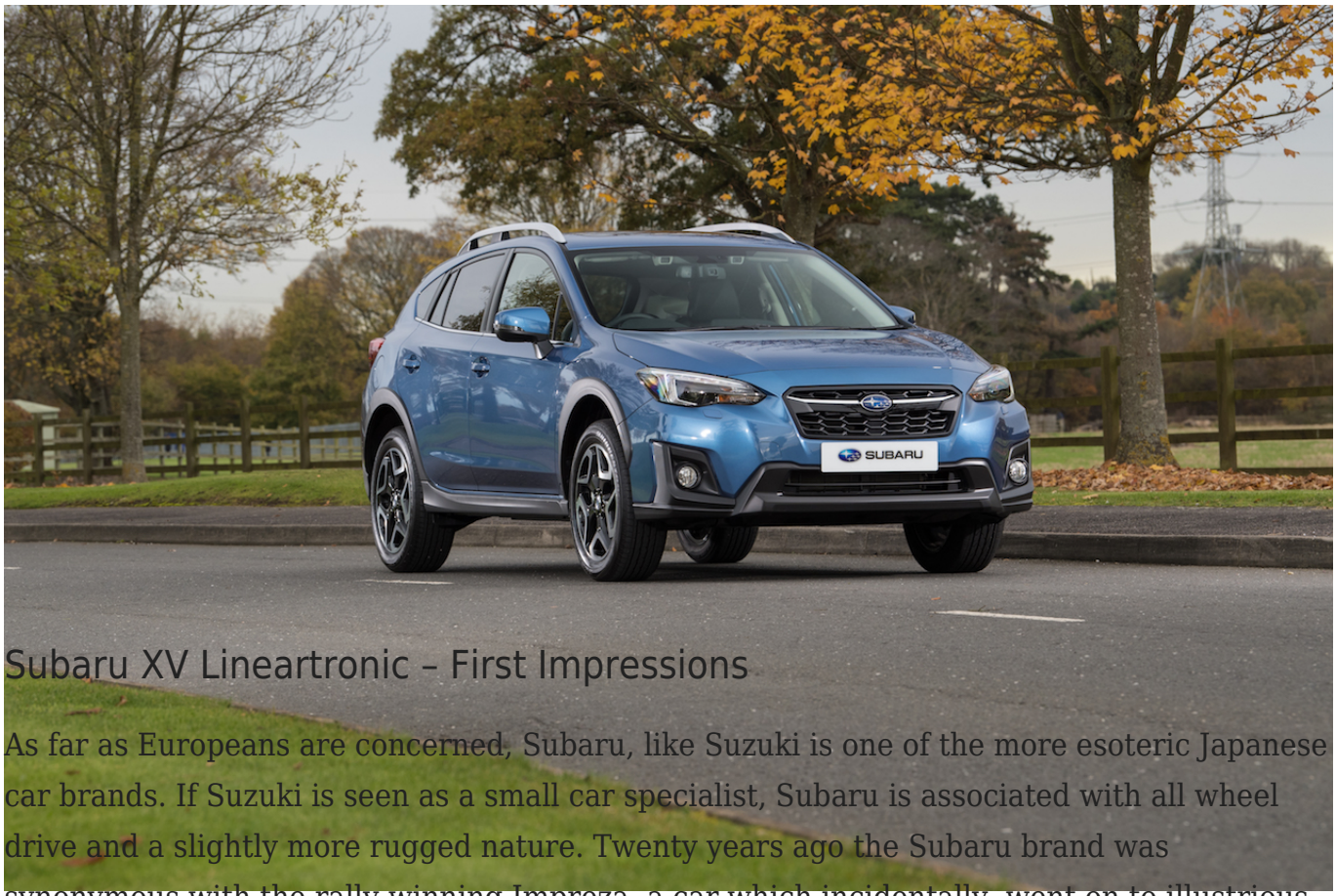
Subaru XV Lineartronic – First Impressions

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As far as Europeans are concerned, Subaru, like Suzuki is one of the more esoteric Japanese car brands. If Suzuki is seen as a small car specialist, Subaru is associated with all wheel drive and a slightly more rugged nature. Twenty years ago the Subaru brand was synonymous with the rally-winning Impreza, a car which incidentally, went on to illustrious careers with police forces in France and Belgium. Meanwhile Subaru's Legacy Outback and Forester models have long had a minor cult following thanks in part to the image of genuine off-road ability. Almost by accident Subaru has in more recent years found itself in a market that other manufacturers are now rushing to get into, namely the 'crossover' segment. This latest version of the SUV is a semi 'off-road' combination of urban SUV and the conventional hatchback. In Europe, the mid size SUV market has for years been the fastest growing segment and now the market leaders are moving to offer 'crossovers' as well: Nissan led the

way with the original Qashqai, later joined by its Renault Kadjar cousin while Kia's Sportage and BMW's X1 are major players; significant 4×4 newcomers to are VW Group's Seat Ateca and the VolkswagenT-Roc.

Subaru's contribution to this field is the XV which first appeared in 2012. Despite having separate model status in Subaru's range, the SV was essentially a raised Impreza: the XV quickly established itself in the crossover category as likeable also-ran whose wider appeal was nevertheless not obvious beyond marque devotees. Now Subaru has addressed this by introducing a 'Mark 2' XV. This is an important step for the company as the new XV uses the Subaru Global Platform which will underpin the next Impreza and other new models. Subaru claims that use of higher strength steels in this chassis has increased rigidity between 70 and 100%. This means that the car rolls less, also noise, vibration and harshness are reduced and straightline stability is enhanced; moreover the vehicle is structurally safer. Already in receipt of five stars and judged best in class by Euro NCAP, Subaru's own test crashes have shown that the latest XV withstands a 2.5 tonne impact at 90 kph (around 60 mph) without deformation of the passenger compartment.

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Visually the XV is hard to tell from its predecessor, though its overall dimensions are slightly larger. The cabin benefits from improvements to the facia and a new 8 inch touchscreen which is easier to use. The introduction of Subaru's 'Eyesight' emergency braking feature brings stereo cameras whose images are merged to produce wide angle perspective ahead and behind. The breadth of vision when reversing is especially impressive; these cameras also recognise colour and as such are more sensitive than radar says Subaru, picking up brake lights as well as pedestrian hazards outside the driver's own visual field.



Mechanically the XV is as before, using Subaru's familiar horizontally-opposed four cylinder engine and permanent all-wheel drive. There is a choice of petrol units – 1600c or the two-litre tested here. There is no longer a diesel option and to judge from the fall in demand for diesel cars across Europe, Subaru may even be ahead of the curve here. The only transmission offered is Subaru's CVT: It works like the Derailleur gears on a bicycle, changing ratio imperceptibly with its variable pulleys.



On the road

Sitting almost a foot above the road makes the Subaru easy to climb into and out of. The cabin is spacious with ample rear legroom and the seats are supportive. Cabin materials are functional rather than luxurious and the XV's sombre interior would benefit from some flashes of colour without undermining the image Subaru seeks to promote of a car with serious off road abilities. In fact this quality is something that Subaru is keen to point out, stressing that its XV is no 4×2 SUV modified to be a 4×4 with the compromises that entails. The driving position is commanding and visibility is further enhanced by the intelligently designed 'quarterlights' which eliminate much of the vast blindsport caused by the thick 'A' pillars and door mirrors of modern designs. First impressions are of considerable refinement. The boxer engine is quiet and CVT gearchanges are unobtrusive, and indeed the XV does fulfill many of Subaru's claims. The steering is light, but accurate and the XV is not

difficult to place on a twisting road. Performance is lively, though the engine does make itself heard when fully solicited; such treatment never seems to upset the transmission, but for all the CVT's smoothness, more enthusiastic drivers would still have preferred a manual gearbox option.

Subaru is keen to demonstrate how far its new chassis has improved the XV's dynamics: Sportingly it gave journalists a chance to try both old and new XVs on a slalom course marked out by cones on wet tarmac. If both models gripped tenaciously despite severe driver provocation, the later car was noticeably more composed, rolling less and responding more quickly to the driver's swerving abruptly during emergency braking. In a trial on muddy tracks, the new XV kept its traction remarkably, its party trick – its X mode which transfers the available torque to one wheel when it detects the other three have lost grip; it successfully pulled the Subaru out of ruts where less specific off road 4x4s would undoubtedly have bogged down.

VERDICT

Subaru's intentions to make a bigger impact in the SUV segment are clear, but the company does want to differentiate itself, acknowledging that there are faster, more spacious, more economical (even more stylish) mid-size SUVs. None though can handle life off tarmac quite like the Subaru and the company's aim is to recruit more owners who will understand and value these particular abilities. It is a strategy which has worked well in North America and Scandinavia. As much a product of engineers as stylists, unusual in a volume manufacturer, the XV seems destined to further Subaru's reputation as the car for the discerning owner who has really thought about why he or she wants a 4×4.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Subaru XV Lineartronic five door SUV

Engine: Horizontally opposed 4 cyl 1995cc; direct injection, naturally aspirated petrol

Compression ratio: 12.5:1

Transmission: CVT constantly variable transmission, all wheel drive

Max power & torque: 154 bhp @ 6000 rpm, 196 Nm (145lb/ft) @ 4,000 rpm

Performance: 0–62mph: 9.9 secs/Top speed: 119 mph

Fuel consumption, Combined mpg: 40.9

Emissions: CO2: 140g/km

Dimensions: 4,465mm x 1,800 mm x 1,615mm; boot capacity: 385,litres; kerb weight 1439 kg (1,758” x 708” x 636”, 13.6 cu ft, 3,166 lbs)

Price: from £24,995