

2014 Subaru Forester **Completely redesigned, slightly bigger, much better.**

Overview

The Subaru Forester all-wheel drive compact crossover is completely redesigned for 2014. This fourth-generation 2014 Forester is slightly larger in all dimensions than the outgoing model (2009-2013). It wears somewhat bolder skin wrapped around a roomier cabin and boasts both improved performance and higher fuel economy.

A 170-horsepower 2.5-liter horizontally opposed flat four-cylinder (aka boxer or H4) is standard on the 2014 Forester, while a new 250-hp turbocharged version of the BRZ sports car's 2.0-liter H4 powers 2014 Forester 2.0XT models. It uses a combination of direct fuel injection, high compression (10.6:1), Subaru's Dual Active Valve Control System (D-AVCS) and intercooled turbocharging to deliver a much more spirited 250 horsepower and 258 pound-feet of torque between 2000 and 4800 rpm.

All 2014 Forester models come with Subaru Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive. Subaru is a leader in all-wheel-drive technology and this sets Forester apart from front-wheel-drive competitors that offer all-wheel drive as an option. A 6-speed manual gearbox supersedes the previous 5-speed manual as standard, while Subaru's Lineartronic continuously variable transmission (CVT) replaces the old 4-speed automatic.

The CVT mated to the 2.5-liter engine has a selectable low shift mode that adds engine braking on downhill grades. The high-torque version of this transmission comes with the turbo engine and has steering wheel paddles for manual shifting. Both use adaptive control to continually optimize gear ratios based on driving preferences and conditions.

The 2.5-liter four-cylinder together with the CVT, likely the best-selling combination, boasts the segment's best all-wheel drive fuel economy at an EPA-estimated 24/32 mpg City/Highway, or 27 Combined. That highway rating is a five-mpg improvement over the most fuel-efficient 2013 Forester.

Compared to the previous-generation model, this new 2014 Forester feels more agile thanks to a 50-percent stiffer structure, retuned front strut and double-wishbone rear suspensions and larger, 17-inch tires and wheels. The upgraded rear suspension uses pillow ball joint mounts for its lateral links to smooth the ride. We found the four-wheel independent suspension delivers fairly agile handling with good ride. The new Electric Power Assisted Steering gives surprisingly good feel and feedback while contributing to improved fuel efficiency.

The much quicker, more athletic and more fun to drive 2014 Forester 2.0XT turbo models boast a sport-tuned suspension on 18-inch wheels and larger brakes with ventilated rotors front and rear.

Technology abounds on the 2014 Forester: A new rearview camera along with a new color multi-function display are available. Subaru's available new EyeSight driver assist system uses a stereo camera (instead of radar) to integrate Adaptive Cruise Control, Pre-Collision Braking and Vehicle Lane Departure Warning.

A Subaru Intelligent Drive (SI-DRIVE) feature on 2.0XT models has a steering-wheel switch that lets you choose from among three driving modes: Intelligent (relaxed throttle response for normal driving), Sport (quicker throttle response and a 6-speed-manual mode for the CVT), or Sport Sharp. The latter delivers even quicker response with eight manually selectable ratios.

All Foresters come with Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive. CVT models use a more sophisticated electronically managed type than do those with the 6-speed manual. Both systems continuously power all four wheels, transfer torque to those with the best grip and integrate with the Vehicle Dynamics Control (VDC) system to improve all-weather traction and stability.

A new X-Mode feature on upgrade models optimizes control of the engine, transmission, Active AWD, brakes, VDC and other systems to further improve control on slippery surfaces and steep inclines, while Hill Descent Control uses the VDC system to maintain constant speed and improve control on downhill grades.

We are impressed with the 2014 Forester's improved dry-surface dynamics (ride, handling, steering, braking) and its noticeably roomier, quieter, more comfortable cabin. The Forester 2.0XT's tighter suspension and more aggressive tires elevate this five-passenger compact CUV almost to the level of sport-sedan fun.

Acceleration performance with the standard engine is slow (capable of 0-60 mph in a long 9.3 seconds), but the 2.0XT's powerful turbo engine improves that measure to a quick 6.2 seconds. Earlier Subaru boxer engines were rough, but they have become far smoother and more refined in recent years.

The 2014 Subaru Forester boasts several advantages over its most popular competitors among the compact crossover utility vehicles. Most important are Forester's standard all-wheel drive at a lower price than Toyota's RAV4, Honda's CR-V, and Mazda's CX-5 with optional all-wheel drive. Forester also boasts a roomier cabin front and rear and surprisingly better EPA fuel economy with the available CVT vs. the competition when equipped with automatic transmissions and all-wheel drive.

Model Lineup

2014 Subaru Forester models offer a choice of engines. Forester 2.5i models come with a 170-hp 2.5-liter engine and a choice of CVT or 6-speed manual. Forester 2.0XT models feature a 250-hp 2.0-liter turbocharged engine with CVT.

Forester 2.5i (\$21,995) comes with cloth upholstery, air conditioning, Bluetooth hands-free phone connectivity and audio streaming with steering wheel control switches and a tilt/telescopic steering column, Incline Start Assist, outside temperature display, security system with engine immobilizer, carpeted floor mats, multi-function display with outside temperature and fuel economy readouts, 17-inch steel wheels. A 6-speed manual is standard, Forester 2.5i CVT (\$22,995) includes the continuously variable transmission.

Forester 2.5i Premium (\$23,495) gets upgraded audio, 10-way power driver's seat, rearview camera, upgraded multi-function display, reclining rear seatbacks, dark tint privacy rear glass, and 17-inch alloy wheels. Premium with the 6-speed manual comes with an All-Weather Package, which includes heated front seats, heated exterior mirrors and a windshield wiper de-icer. Forester 2.5i Premium CVT (\$24,995) also comes with a panoramic power moonroof, but the All-Weather Package (\$500) is an option. Navigation is optional (\$1,100).

Forester 2.0XT Premium (\$27,995) includes the turbocharged engine and CVT and cloth upholstery with sport bolsters.

Forester 2.5i Limited (\$27,995) gets the CVT and All-Weather Package as standard, plus perforated leather-trimmed seats, a power rear liftgate, fog lamps, upgraded instrument cluster with LCD, leather-wrapped steering wheel and shifter, automatic climate control and new X-Mode, which adjusts the suspension for slick conditions, with Hill Descent Control. Navigation is optional (\$1,100).

Forester 2.5i Touring (\$29,995) and Forester 2.0XT Touring (\$32,995) include the leather trim and other Limited features and the CVT and add touch-screen navigation, 440-watt, eight-speaker harman/kardon premium audio with Aha smartphone integration, an electroluminescent instrument cluster with LCD display and a one-touch folding rear seatback. The Driver Assist Technology package (\$2,400) includes EyeSight, Keyless Access/Start and HID headlights.

Safety features standard on all models include intelligent dual-stage front airbags, front seat side and side curtain airbags with added head protection for front and rear occupants. A rollover sensor activates seat belt pretensioners and deploys the curtain bags if it senses a potential rollover. New for 2014 are anti-whiplash front seats, a driver's knee airbag, Brake Override and an impact-sensing fuel cutoff. The Brake Override cuts engine power if both brake and accelerator are applied beyond a certain threshold. All-wheel drive is standard. A rearview camera is optional and can help the driver spot a small child behind the vehicle when backing up.

Walkaround

The fourth-generation 2014 Subaru Forester is 1.4 inches longer, 0.6 inches wider and 1.3 inches taller than the outgoing model on a 0.9-inch longer wheelbase.

The 2014 Forester's all-new body has an evolutionary look (not much different from the 2013) but with sharply defined new details. So-called hawk-eye headlights and a slightly taller hexagonal grille define its slightly bolder face. All have lightweight aluminum hoods, black side cladding and body-color door handles.

Turbocharged 2.0XT models lead with a more aggressive sport front bumper, a one-piece mesh grille and, on the 2.0XT Touring, chrome-rimmed fog lamp bezels. The 2.0XTs also sport dual stainless steel exhaust tips.

The A-pillar (the strips of metal between the windshield and front windows) on the 2014 Forester is moved forward for a sleeker silhouette and improved aerodynamics. Forward visibility is improved despite a slightly higher hood (to meet European pedestrian-protection requirements), which makes room for under-hood ducting to feed the 2.0XTs' turbocharger intercoolers instead of their predecessors' boy-racer hood scoop. New partitioned front door side glass and door-mounted mirrors help reduce wind noise and improve side visibility. Subaru says the 2014 Forester's 0.33 drag coefficient is nearly 11 percent better than the outgoing model's.

Interior Features

The new interior takes advantage of the 2014 Forester's expanded roominess by creating a feeling of spaciousness through a combination of horizontal design elements and more space between the instrument panel and seats.

The front seats use a new cushion spring array for long-distance comfort, the hip point is 1.1 inches higher than before, and the driver's seat has 1.3 inches more fore-aft and 0.6 inches more height adjustment travel. Materials are upgraded compared to previous models with soft-touch surfaces on the upper instrument panels and armrests.

Rivaling some larger vehicles, rear-seat legroom is 41.7 inches in the 2014 Forester, from the previous 38.0, ample room for a leggy six-footer even with the front seat all the way back, and there's more room than before for a center rear passenger. Wider-opening rear doors make it easier to climb in and out and to install a child seat, and the rear seatbacks recline a bit in all but the base 2.5i model.

To better accommodate cargo, the load floor is flatter and total capacity is increased to 74.7 cubic feet when the standard 60/40 split rear seats are folded down. The available power moonroof cuts cargo space to 68.5 cubic feet.

Instruments are limited to large, round speedometer and tachometer dials and a digital fuel gauge between them. We appreciated the blue cold-engine light following a cold start but would have gladly traded it for a real temperature gauge. The climate controls are very nice. We also loved that top-center color screen for the rearview camera, which can also display a multitude of information including average fuel economy, range and entertainment system selection.

The base Forester 2.5i has a 4.3-inch LCD screen at top center of the dash that displays outside temperature, fuel economy and a road surface freeze warning. All other models have a multifunction color display with rearview camera, audio and Bluetooth information, climate control, vehicle self-check and maintenance reminder; when equipped, X-Mode and Hill Descent Control operation are displayed as well. Premium and Limited models offer a new standard six-speaker audio system with AM/FM HD (but no satellite) radio with capability to play music from CD, Bluetooth audio streaming, iPod and other players.

GPS navigation comes with a 6.1-inch LCD touch screen, voice-activated controls, Aha smartphone integration features, iTunes tagging, Bluetooth hands-free phone connectivity, SMS Text Messaging and XM Satellite Radio with NavTraffic. Compared to others in this class, however, this infotainment screen seems a bit dated and small, with small touch pads (instead of easy-to-use knobs) for volume and tuning.

Touring models come with a premium 440-watt, eight-speaker harman/kardon system.

We found the covered console box small, but there's a large open bin under the climate dials that also contains a convenient 12V accessory outlet. The steering wheel spokes offer handy buttons for audio, cruise, phone and multi-function display control.

Driving Impressions

The Forester 2.5i offers strong mid-range torque and we were pleased by its willing performance. This non-turbocharged engine is rated at 170 horsepower peaking at 5800 rpm. Its torque, that force that propels you away from intersections, peaks at 174 pound-feet from 2000 to 4000 rpm, a broad range. That makes the Forester 2.5i feel responsive when driving around town. Acceleration performance when drag racing from a standstill is slow, however, taking a very long 9.3 seconds to accelerate from 0 to 60 mph.

Fuel economy for the Forester 2.5i is an EPA-estimated 24/32 mpg City/Highway with CVT, 22/29 mpg with 6-speed manual transmission. Regular gasoline is recommended, so there's no need to buy more-expensive Premium. Over a week of mixed local driving, a Forester 2.5i we drove averaged 23.1 mpg, not great but acceptable for an all-wheel-drive compact utility vehicle.

We think the Forester 2.5i works best with the 6-speed-manual; the available CVT does sap some of this engine's energy. We liked the manual transmission's crisp shifter and smooth clutch.

Forester 2.0XT can accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in a quick 6.2 seconds. Forester 2.0XT models feature a turbocharged 2.0-liter engine rated at 250 horsepower at 5600 rpm and 258 pound-feet of torque between 2000 and 4800 rpm. Indeed, we found the 2.0XT's willing turbo engine runs out of steam at a modest 6000 rpm. The 2.0XT engine uses a combination of direct fuel injection, high compression (10.6:1), Subaru's Dual Active Valve Control System (D-AVCS) and intercooled turbocharging. Forester 2.0XT models come with the CVT.

Fuel economy for Forester 2.0XT models is an EPA-rated 23/28 mpg. Premium gasoline is recommended for these high-compression, turbocharged engines.

Not surprisingly, this compact utility vehicle is no fire-breathing track carver, but the Forester 2.0XT's sport suspension on more aggressive 18-inch tires and wheels is definitely sharper and more responsive than the standard set-up, and its larger ventilated-rotor brakes are stronger and more effective.

We witnessed a demonstration that showed Forester's all-wheel drive to be very capable up and over a steep, slicked-down ramp.

We appreciated Forester's tight turning circle (34.8 feet), useful in crowded parking lots. The new efficiency-enhancing Electric Power Assisted Steering (EPAS) seemed surprisingly good on both road and track, and we made good use of the multitude of useful information provided by its top-center data screen.

Summary

More refined, more practical and more appealing than before, and with EPA-rated fuel efficiency competitive with most front-wheel-drive competitors, this new 2014 Forester compares well with Ford's Escape, Mazda's CX-5 and even segment leaders Toyota RAV4 and Honda CR-V. It's name is indicative: Forester does really well in the forest, where Subaru's superb all-wheel drive and balanced handling are perfectly suited to slippery conditions and winding roads.

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