

★ SPORT/UTILITY OF THE YEAR: AND THE WINNER IS... ★

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**2009 sport/utility of the year**  
**SUBARU FORESTER**



**winner: subaru forester**

**2009 sport/utility of the year**



# **clearcut**

SOARING FUEL PRICES AND A FIZZLING  
ECONOMY HAVE MADE IT A JUNGLE OUT  
THERE, BUT THIS YEAR'S WINNER IS EASY  
TO SEE FOR THE TREES

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## 2009 sport/utility of the year



**IT WOULD** be easy to say that this year's winner is a knee-jerk reaction, that the editors of *Motor Trend* responded to the skyrocketing cost of gasoline like the rest of the driving public by abruptly abandoning the traditional SUV formula for something smaller, more fuel-efficient, greener, more well, forest-y. It would be easy to categorize our selection of the Subaru Forester as *Motor Trend's* 2009 Sport/Utility of the Year as a choice made solely at the pump, but it wouldn't be true.

Sure, our Subaru Forester 2.5XT contender

posted the best observed fuel-economy numbers (16.0 mpg) for an all-wheel-drive SUV in this year's competition, but that's not the whole story.

So how does a small, quirky, former airplane manufacturer from the Gunma prefecture of Japan finish first among surprise offerings from established players and bold moves by newcomers? How does it beat a chest-thumping, head-turning macho mobile known as the BMW X6? How, when Ford wraps stylish sheetmetal around a Gulfstream V interior and calls it Flex? How can it win,

when Kia serves notice to the entire category with its own body-on-frame, V-8-powered Borrego, and Infiniti conjures up seven-speed transmissions and jaw-dropping bird's-eye-view monitoring systems?

Just how does the Subaru Forester do it?

Let's start with the humble powertrain. On paper, it's nothing new or particularly special; all Forester models receive a version of the 2.5-liter horizontally opposed four-cylinder found in the Impreza sedan. Transmission options are even less stunning: a carried-over five-speed manual or four-speed automatic for entry-level 2.5X models; auto only if you opt for the turbocharged 2.5XT variant.

At the track, that four-speed, 224-horsepower Forester 2.5XT zips to 60 mph in 7.2 seconds and to the quarter mile in just 15.5. Not as impressive as the 6.6 and 15.1-second runs a similarly equipped Forester 2.5XT managed in our previous comparison ("Turbo Chargers," September 2008), but still as fast or faster than all but the BMW X6, Lexus LX 570, Toyota Sequoia, and Infiniti FX and EX. It's not just fast, but fuel friendly, too. In that comparison, the Forester 2.5XT logged the best observed and EPA-certified city/highway fuel economy (19.6 mpg, 19/24 mpg) against the turbo fours and six-speeds of Mazda CX-7 and VW Tiguan.

Says St. Antoine, "I'm amazed at how well





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the powertrain works with only a four-speed. The turbo four is torquey enough not to feel like it needs more ratios, and at cruising speed it's not revving overly hard."

The naturally aspirated Forester is no slouch, either. Rated at 170 for power and torque, the 2.5X takes regular unleaded,

returns even better EPA fuel economy (20/26 mpg), and is classified as a partial-zero-emissions vehicle. Not only is the Forester class dominant, it's as green as a you-know-what.

More feats of engineering competence were revealed when we broke out the tape

measure. While classmates like the VW Tiguan manage only 56.1/23.8 cubic feet of cargo space behind the front/rear seats, the Forester yields a whopping 63.0/30.8. Similar spatial advantages are seen in the commodious driver and passenger compartments; in our other small-CUV comparison test ("The Frugal Five," June 2008), the Forester provided the most front/rear headroom and front legroom in a field that included the Honda CR-V, Nissan Rogue, Saturn Vue, and Toyota RAV4.

Still not impressed? Then factor in the one metric that puts the S in SUV: ground clearance. With an undercarriage 8.9 inches (8.7 for Forester 2.5X) above ground, the Forester 2.5XT not only beats every one of the CUVs in the two aforementioned comparisons, it equals or betters fellow SUV of the Year contenders Honda Pilot (8.0), Kia Borrego (8.5), and Lexus LX 570 (8.9). Consider those mere soft-roaders? Both Foresters beat or equal the Land Rover LR2 (8.3), Toyota FJ Cruiser 4x2 (8.7), and Ford Expedition 4x4 (8.7). Inside and out, off-road and on, this little Subaru is truly an impressive feat of packaging.

Despite high clearances, the Forester doesn't drive particularly tall. In fact, in a field that includes two bona-fide hot-rods (BMW X6, Infiniti FX) and, let's face it, a car (Infiniti EX35), the Subaru produced more

## STUMP PULLER: A NEW BOXER DIESEL



**IN ADDITION** to the Forester's two gasoline-fueled powerplants, by 2010, U.S. models may also sport a new boxer diesel recently released in the European market. The world's first production boxer diesel, the turbocharged, DOHC, 2.0-liter four makes 145 horses at 3600 rpm but a mighty 258 pound-feet of torque at 1800 rpm. Standard and only transmission is a six-speed manual newly developed for the diesel (Subaru doesn't have an auto able to handle the diesel's torque and says developing a new tranny is unlikely). The Forester 2.0D's estimated EPA city/highway fuel efficiency checks in at an amazing 34/41 mpg. Towing capacity climbs to a lofty 4400 pounds. Price: about \$2800 more than the turbo gas four. Want to see the Forester 2.0D stateside? Send Subaru your thumbs-up now. ■ **arthur st. antoine**



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than its fair share of grins on our real-world/off-road loop.

Says Lassa, "It's as much fun as the EX35 with better mileage. The Infiniti seems more planted, but the Subie is light on its feet."

"Ride quality is remarkably nice on Alisos Canyon Road, and it's way big dirty fun on the rally stage," notes Markus.

*Truck Trend* editor Mark Williams adds, "A few rough shakes when the tarmac is broken, but overall it handles more like a solid crossover. When it gets on dirt, it seems to encourage you to go faster, almost saying, 'It's all right, I've got your back. Let's go.'"

Analysis of these fine driving characteristics reveals more of the Forester's comprehensive and complementary competence. It's not enough to simply credit its feathery 3447-pound curb weight (lowest of all contenders) or new control-arm rear suspension. We must mention the engine again and highlight its compact, horizontal cylinder arrangement, which allows it to sit low in this high-riding chassis, reducing the center of gravity. Plus that new rear suspension not only smooths out the ride, but its layout also means less cabin intrusion and all that extra room in the cargo area.

Contrast these harmonious revelations with the comments about runner-up Ford Flex—so many positive attributes often scuttled by negatives. While the Forester manages to be big on the inside, small on the outside, the Flex feels only big and bigger. As for the powertrain, Flex's Duratec V-6 and six-speed transmission perform respectably at the track and pump, but often feel grainy, harsh, and unrewarding.

Then there's the value proposition. With a starting price of \$20,660, our Subaru is the most affordable AWD SUV in this group. Perhaps not saying much in a field that includes \$65,000 Infiniti and \$80,000 Lexus behemoths, until you look at what's included. Naturally, Subaru's hallmark symmetrical AWD system is found on all models, but so are such features as four-wheel disc brakes with ABS, VDC traction control, three 12-volt power points, including one in the rear-cargo area, HVAC filtration, and gas-filled hood struts (Toyota and Honda still use cheaper prop rods). Fully spec'd models have luxuries including liquid-filled engine mounts, heated seats, front windshield-wiper de-icers, a touch-screen GPS navigation system, and a massive, all-glass moonroof. Yet, with all that kit and more, our 2.5XT Limited topped out at only \$31,523.



**BASE FORESTER**  
2.5X models come with a 170-horse, 2.5-liter boxer four-cylinder engine and either a five-speed manual or four-speed automatic trans. Turbocharged 2.5XT comes with 224 horses and only the four-speed auto.





Of course, it isn't perfect. No SUV is, not even the one that wins Sport/Utility of the Year. For starters, if you're interested in moving more than five people or 2400 pounds of towable gear, the Forester must be chopped from your list.

Some judges also dinged the Subaru for its "parts-bin interior" and lack of style. Others pegged this simplicity as back-to-basics goodness. "After some of the other complex, flight-deck instrument panels (like the aptly named Pilot's), the Subaru's simple and easy-to-use controls are a welcome break. VW easily trumps the Subaru for visual pizzazz, though the Forester works better," comments St. Antoine. In other words, quiet, comprehensive competence.

No, our selection of the Subaru Forester as *Motor Trend's* 2009 Sport/Utility of the Year is not a reaction to prices at the pump, but a renewed appreciation for the value of the dollar and a thoughtfully designed, well-executed vehicle. At a time when our nation is paying the piper for poor investments and past excesses, the Forester brings to mind many of the humble values that made this country great: thrift, resourcefulness, doing more with less.

St. Antoine sums it up best, "It takes only a few miles to begin to appreciate the Forester's many virtues. It does everything most SUV buyers need—with more off-road capability than they'll likely use—yet remains friendly and carlike in its character. In many ways, the Forester represents the new SUV paradigm; it's the right vehicle for the times." ■



## 2009 SUBARU FORESTER 2.5X 2.5XT LIMITED

2009 SUBARU FORESTER 2.5X 2.5XT LIMITED		
<b>POWERTRAIN/CHASSIS</b>		
DRIVETRAIN LAYOUT	Front engine, AWD	Front engine, AWD
ENGINE TYPE	Flat-4, alum block/heads	Turbo flat-4, alum block/heads
VALVETRAIN	SOHC, 4 valves/cyl	DOHC, 4 valves/cyl
DISPLACEMENT	149.9 cu in/2457 cc	149.9 cu in/2457 cc
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.1:1	8.4:1
POWER (SAE NET)	170 hp @ 6000 rpm	224 hp @ 5200 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	170 lb-ft @ 4400 rpm	226 lb-ft @ 2800 rpm
WEIGHT TO POWER	19.5 lb/hp	15.3 lb/hp
TRANSMISSION	4-speed auto	4-speed auto
AXLE/FINAL/LOW RATIOS	4.44:1/3.08:1/--	4.44:1/3.08:1/--
SUSPENSION, FRONT; REAR	Struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar; control arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar	Struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar; control arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar
STEERING RATIO	16.5:1	16.5:1
TURNS LOCK-TO-LOCK	3.2	3.2
BRAKES, F;R	11.7-in vented disc; 11.3-in disc, ABS	11.7-in vented disc; 11.3-in disc, ABS
WHEELS, F;R	7.0 x 17 in, cast aluminum	7.0 x 17 in, cast aluminum
TIRES, F;R	225/55R17 95H M+S, Yokohama Geolander G95	225/55R17 95H M+S, Yokohama Geolander G95
<b>DIMENSIONS</b>		
WHEELBASE	103.0 in	103.0 in
TRACK, F/R	60.2/60.2 in	60.2/60.2 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	179.5 x 70.1 x 66.9 in	179.5 x 70.1 x 66.9 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	8.7 in	8.9 in
APPRCH/DEPART ANGLE	24.8/24.8 deg	24.8/24.8 deg
TURNING CIRCLE	34.4 ft	34.4 ft
CURB WEIGHT	3308 lb	3447 lb
WEIGHT DIST, F/R	55/45%	56/44%
TOWING CAPACITY	2400 lb	2400 lb
SEATING CAPACITY	5	5
HEADROOM, F/R	41.6/40.4	40.0/37.7 in
LEGRoom, F/R	43.1/38.0 in	43.1/38.0 in
SHOULDER ROOM, F/R	56.1/55.6 in	56.1/55.6 in
CARGO VOL BEHIND, F/R	68.3/33.5 cu ft	63.0/30.8 cu ft
<b>TEST DATA</b>		
<b>ACCELERATION TO MPH</b>		
0-30	3.1 sec	2.2 sec
0-40	4.9	3.5
0-50	7.4	5.3
0-60	9.9	7.2
0-70	13.1	9.4
0-80	17.9	12.6
0-90	N/A	16.3
PASSING, 45-65 MPH	5.1 sec	3.8 sec
QUARTER MILE	17.4 sec @ 78.9 mph	15.5 sec @ 88.2 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	129 ft	131 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.78 g (avg)	0.78 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	28.8 sec @ 0.56 g (avg)	28.1 sec @ 0.60 g (avg)
TOP-GEAR REVS @ 60 MPH	2450 rpm	2250 rpm
<b>CONSUMER INFO</b>		
BASE PRICE	\$20,660	\$28,860
PRICE AS TESTED	\$23,140	\$31,523
STABILITY/TRACTION CONTROL	Yes/yes	Yes/yes
AIRBAGS	Dual front, front side, f/r curtain	Dual front, front side, f/r curtain
BASIC WARRANTY	3 yrs/36,000 miles	3 yrs/36,000 miles
POWERTRAIN WARRANTY	5 yrs/60,000 miles	5 yrs/60,000 miles
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	3 yrs/36,000 miles	3 yrs/36,000 miles
FUEL CAPACITY	16.9 gal	16.9 gal
EPA CITY/HWY ECON	20/26 mpg	19/24 mpg
CO <sub>2</sub> EMISSIONS	0.87 lb/mile	0.93 lb/mile
MT FUEL ECONOMY	20.1 mpg	16.0 mpg
RECOMMENDED FUEL	Regular	Premium



