

## *Subaru Impreza WRX Road Test by Ian Lammings*

WHEN the world got its first glimpse of the new Impreza there was a sharp intake of breath – and not necessarily for the right reasons.

Previous models were no lookers and that was part of the attraction. The very first Impreza was so anonymous you found yourself bumping your shins on it in the car park.

It then won rather a lot of world rallies and humiliated many a sports car with a prestigious badge and price tag to match. A cult car was born.

As it moved into adolescence, Impreza sprouted bonnet scoops and spotlights, looky-likey rally graphics and even gold wheels. It appealed to the Berghouse/Burberry brigade but just about everyone admired its bad boy reputation and stunning driving dynamics, so to hell with the looks. But the latest WRX does leave observers scratching their collective heads. It's a queer looking fish with curious lines, a Far Eastern face and, in a radical departure from the incumbent, conventional hatchback-only form.

It looks a bit like an '80s Astra, blinged to oblivion and back by raiders of the catalogue parts. But fret not; inside every new Impreza is a WRX of epic proportions. Forget the new look. Once you are inside and under way aesthetics matter little.

WRX has always been about the drive and the new one is no exception. It remains a rally car with number plates. The 2.5 litre boxer engine is as powerful as ever. The 230PS figure doesn't really do the car justice. It accelerates like a car with another 100PS under the hood. In virtually any gear it hurtles down the road and the seamless reserves of brute strength are absolutely astounding. And this is just the mild version – just wait for the 300+bhp STi which is heading round the corner.

Floor the throttle and it whistles like a jet. It flies like one too and will hit 60mph in the fives, while top speed is an adequate 130mph. But it's the in-gear performance that continues to impress the most.

In third, fourth or even fifth gear, there is neck-snapping acceleration which makes the WRX such a usable cross-country tool. Slow moving vehicles are dispatched with utter contempt and gradients climbed like a rocket. All the time, keeping the body in check, is the supreme Subaru all wheel drive system. Steering and grip astonish in all road conditions yet the ride is surprisingly soft, smooth and compliant.

The old model was pretty peerless but the new is noticeably better in certain areas. The previously notchy gearbox is much sharper and easy to use. The engine is even more refined, particularly when cruising along the motorway and road noise fails to intrude on cabin ambience.

Impreza also benefits from a much improved interior. It has shades of Subaru's trick and trendy Tribeca SUV with sweeping lines across the dash. The red-lettered clocks are attractive and well placed. Plastics seem higher quality and the sports seats are excellent. So as a car the Impreza does deserve to wear the WRX moniker leaving just a question mark hanging over the looks.

Test car needed to be washed as it had a date with the video camera. Impreza proved to be a delight under the gentle touch of brush, sponge and chamois, its awkward lines giving way to a tactile nature that belies its ugly duck look. Surfaces are delightfully smooth; panel gaps straight and even. You can feel the quality of the build and when the task is complete Impreza does stand proudly on the drive.

Give it time, be prepared to become intimate and the WRX is definitely a unique car you can learn to love.



### **Vital Statistics**

Model: Subaru Impreza WRX  
Engine: 2.5 litre, 16v, turbo charged four cylinder boxer, petrol  
Drivetrain: Five speed manual  
Power: 230PS  
Top speed: 130mph  
0-62mph: 6.1secs  
Insurance group: 18  
Miles per gallon (combined): 27.2  
CO2 (g/km): 246  
Price: from £19,995.00