

A guilty pleasure



Ian Lamming drives the Subaru Impreza WRX STI

AWKWARD. Turning up at a road safety session designed to keep sixth formers safe and sound, I should have thought more carefully about my form of transport.

The fire engine is outside, the firefighters are showing the young drivers the consequences of lairy driving – conviction, injury, death – then I turn up in a rally-bred beast, in rally-inspired livery, gold alloy wheels and a whale-tail spoiler the size of Moby Dick's. Like I said, awkward.

But that's the Subaru Impreza WRX all over and, I have to admit it, it is my guilty pleasure. But then when aren't you going to feel guilty about an STI?

I'd only been behind the wheel a matter of minutes when I began to appreciate another issue – everyone wants to race you.

But, you know what? I have never spent the week driving so slowly. This car has nothing to prove and as a result driver is comfortable enough to let the world get on with it.

It might have 'mid-life crisis' written all over it and my ageing face but it doesn't stop the WRX being magnificent.

It's a phenomenon, a one-off. The motor is a modestly sized 2.5 litre boxer (flat four) but with the helping shove of a turbo-charger this stunning, charismatic powerhouse wallops out 300BHP. That will hurl STI to 60mph in five seconds, which is super car fast.

It passes this supreme power through all four wheels and the Subaru system is second to none, switching the power to the wheels with the most grip.

But it is not for the faint-hearted or the inexperienced as it is counter-intuitive. For the best results and grip the power has to be kept on through the bends – who does that? The natural thing is to lift off either on the approach or through the bend not to punch the throttle. But if you do this, the back and can step out. Be brave and it rewards with tarmac shredding grip.

WRX lost its way a bit when it shifted from saloon to hatch but the latest model is back with a vengeance. It's a striking looking car despite the goldies and whale-tail.

It is also tonnes better inside. Forrester and Legacy always had nice interiors and Impreza was the poor relation. The latest has caught up nicely. Nothing wrong with that interior.

Subaru also startles with its practicality and economy. You would expect a 300BHP motor to languish in the low 20s when it comes to miles per gallon but one dreary wet Sunday morning, when North Yorkshire was shrouded in low cloud and rain, an impromptu run to Windermere for breakfast saw 34mpg on the trip computer.

Ok, in some circumstances WRX is like taking a divorce lawyer to a wedding but I just can't help falling for its many charms.

Now where did I leave my Subaru rally coat and baseball cap?

Fact File

Subaru Impreza
WRX STI
Engine: 2.5 boxer
petrol turbo
Power: 300BHP
0-62mph: 5.2 secs
Top speed:
158mph
Combined miles
per gallon: 34
Transmission: six-
speed manual
CO2 g/km: 242