

Twin test for 'Toyaru'

Ian Lamming sees double with the Subaru BRZ

Fact File

Subaru BRZ
 Engine: 2.0 boxer
 Power: 200PS
 0-62mph: 7.6 secs
 Top speed: 140mph
 Combined miles per gallon: 36.2
 Transmission: six speed manual
 Insurance: 30
 CO2 g/km: 181

I KNOW my cars; always have done, right from the age of four when I could name just about everything on the road.

If that makes me an anorak or a nerd so be it; the world needs all types, doesn't it? Here's an example. The other night I was watching a rerun of Die Hard. Bruce Willis and Samuel L Jackson take off in luke warm pursuit of a bad guy in a battered Eastern European hatchback for comic effect. "That's a Yugo," I tell my partner. "You are very sad," she replies.

So when the latest offering from Subaru arrives on the drive I know exactly how it is going to feel; in fact you could blindfold me and I would know by the smell, the feel, the sound, the way it drives (obviously I would take the blindfold off first) – or could I?

No, I couldn't and I am now very confused. BRZ has a flat four, or boxer engine; check. But it doesn't sound or feel like one. Sporty Subarus are fitted with turbos; not this one. And Scoobies, as they are affectionately termed, always pack four wheel drive; nope, not this time.

So what is it? Well, pop the bonnet and there's a clue. Sitting on top of the engine, atop the Subaru decal, is the word Toyota – and that's what it feels like. In fact you can get the exact same car, badged GT86, from the Toyota garage.

So what is this Toyaru like, really like; only the DST test route will be able to tell. Well, full marks for looks, especially in the lovely metallic blue. Men of a certain age made a bee-

line for it, some asking is this the new Impreza? It is pure sports car; low, wide, sleek and curvaceous with two whopping pipes existing from a tidy rear.

The interior is a bit drab and plasticky. It all works well enough but it's not especially pretty. The sports seats are great but the combo of sensitive throttle, heavy clutch and notchy gearbox make it a challenge to drive smoothly and because the motor lacks torque you need to cog swap readily to make rapid progress.

Accelerating onto the A66 West it feels peppy rather than fast and once you are in sixth it trundles along nicely enough. But the Stang road, with its plethora of hairpins, was just plain hard work. Driver has to be brutal with the BRZ, which is fun if you are in the mood.

Dropping down hill from the CB Hotel towards Reeth BRZ benefits from the fall of the land and the emphasis switches from performance to handling. No faults there. There's no 4x4 but the Subyota grips well.

From Reeth to Richmond it is also impressive steering precisely and riding well the challenging surfaces. Richmond to Scotch Corner requires more stirring of the gearbox because of the climb before bowling down the A1 to Darlington to collect some more admiring glances.

The fast A road to Barnard Castle sees BRZ in its element again. But it's as I drive back to Dalton I realize what the BRZ needs: it requires more Subaru magic in the form of a turbo and all-wheel drive. Then you would have a car to rival the mighty Nissan GTR at a fraction of the cost.

Now that would be a car for a self-confessed petrol head to remember.

