

Suburban Observer & Eccentric Automotive Showcase

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CAREport



Subaru's '96 Outback shows station wagon can be fun

By Anne Fracassa
Avanti NewsFeatures

Bet you've seen it already: Nick "Crocodile" Dundee riding around the Australian outback in a Subaru Legacy Outback. Really funny TV advertisement. Makes you wanna smile.

That's what this 1996 Subaru Legacy Outback wagon does. Makes you smile. From its friendly front fascia to its familiar and cozy interior, this new Legacy Outback is really, really cool.

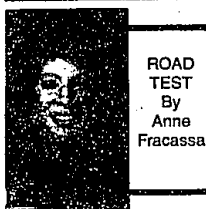
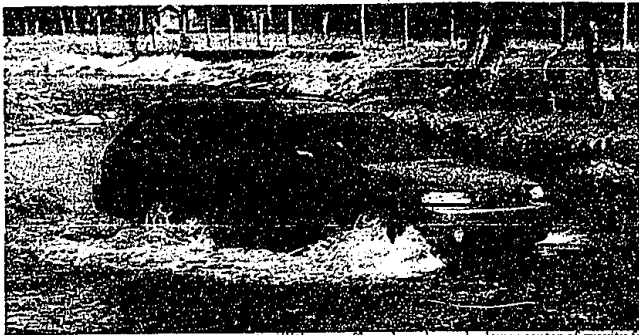
Since it's such a departure — in looks, feel and ride — than the Legacy, Subaru really should've just called it Outback. Call me silly.

No, really, this looks like a station wagon for the family. Functionality is what it looks like. Not fun. Station wagons aren't fun.

Until the Outback. This car is fun to drive, fun to ride around in, and fun to off-road in.

Yep. Imagine your mom off-roading in her 1970s-ish wagon. Scary.

Subaru has always been known for all-weather full-time all-wheel-drive in its passenger

ROAD TEST
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cars. The Outback is no exception. Subaru is calling it America's first sport-utility wagon. It's got that straight. Comfort and convenience of a car coupled with the functionality and capabilities of a truck.

"We're first with a vehicle that fills a niche bridging the gap between the sport-utility vehicle and the passenger car," said George Muller, president of Subaru of America. "Consumers want utility, cargo capacity and go-anywhere all-wheel-drive capabilities without owning a truck. Less than 5 percent of

sport utilities go off road, and our Outback can handle the kinds of unpaved paths the active sport-utility buyer wants to navigate without sacrificing the comfort and convenience of a passenger car."

OK. Let's put that a little simpler — in my 4-year-old's language: "Drive like Cruella, mom." You know, Cruella DeVille (that "crazy woman driver" in 101 Dalmations. Sometimes I like to drive like that. My kids know it. They even ask for it. The Outback is perfect for those times you feel a little ambitious and outgoing.

The Legacy wagon platform was first introduced mid-1994, and the Outback shares that platform. But the buck stops there.

The Outback has features usually not found on sport utilities like an all-wheel-drive that works on all road conditions and at every vehicle speed. Plus, 4-wheel independent suspension, 4-channel 4-wheel anti-lock brakes, dual air bags, door beams that meet 1997 federal side-impact safety standards

and a lower center of gravity for road holding and ride comfort.

Even though the Outback has more than 7 inches of ground clearance, there's a low door-sill height for easier entry and exit.

Comfort is the key here with height-adjustable 3-point front shoulder belts, power windows, power mirrors, power locks, AM/FM cassette stereo, center console with covered-storage armrest, adjustable driver's seat with lumbar support, cruise control and two cup holders. Available are heated front seats, heated outside rearview mirror and an engine-block heater.

In the rear cargo — an impressive 36.5 cubic feet with the rear seat up and 73.6 cubic feet with the rear seat down — you'll find a 12-volt power outlet, tie-down hooks and a removable cargo liner.

The Outback driven was outfitted with a removable cargo bin and dog cage. The removable cargo bin (catchy name, huh?) can hold 10 bags of groceries upright with the use of adjustable separators. A handy thing to have if you only have

one or two bags and you don't want anything to tip over. For \$200, it's an option I probably couldn't live without.

There are two Legacy Outbacks to choose from: A 135-horsepower aluminum-alloy 4-cylinder 16-valve single-overhead-camshaft, horizontally opposed 2.2-liter engine mated to a 5-speed manual transmission with Subaru's own "Hill-Holder" clutch.

It's a healthy 6-speed that responds when you ask it to. The smooth shifter makes it even more fun to drive, rather than a hassle to change gears.

The other offering is a new 2.5-liter 165-horsepower aluminum-alloy 4-cylinder 16-valve dual-overhead cam married to a 4-speed electronically controlled automatic.

The bold, aggressive look of the Outback makes it really appealing. This sport utility station wagon is well worth a look if you want a sport utility without the inconvenience of owning a large truck.

1996 Subaru Legacy Outback	
Vehicle class.....	Mid-size wagon
5-passenger, 3-door coupe	
Engine.....	2.2-liter 4 cylinder
	SOHC engine
Mileage.....	22 city / 29 highway
Where built.....	Lafayette, Ind.
Price	\$21,995

Anne Fracassa writes about new cars for Avanti NewsFeatures.

If you'd like to see a particular model tested or if you have a car question, send Anne Fracassa a message at AVANTI1054, Avanti's America Online mailbox... Or comment through the Internet at AVANTI1054@aol.com

Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti News Features.

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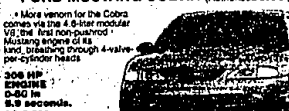
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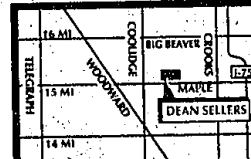
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