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Splashy styling and room for five — without a can opener

CAReport



By Anne Fracassa
Avant NewsFeatures

This is a little out of the ordinary. It got a couple of stares, probably because of the neat

hood scoop.

The 1998 Subaru Impreza 2.5 RS all-wheel-drive coupe has unusually off-beat styling — and that's giving it a compliment. It's got the familial (family) look of the fine Subaru heritage with its trademark grille treatment.

And I like it.

This new Impreza 2.5 RS is an addition to the Impreza line, sort of giving this unique family of cars a new splash of sportiness. There are gold aluminum alloy wheels, projector beam fog lights in front, leather steering wheel and shift knob, driver's footrest, an oversized rear deck spoiler and tasteful black aerodynamic ground effects, plus a sport tailpipe cover. Really good job in the styling arena, guys.

The look of the Impreza 2.5 RS is strikingly similar to the car used in the FIA World Rally Championship series. Subaru has won the manufacturer's championship two years in a row and presently holds the title. Even the hood scoop and passive vents are a direct tie to the rally car.

Also new this year is a redesigned dash and instrument cluster and door panels. Instrumentation is analog, of course. There's a new center console design, and it incorporates a storage



The 1998 Subaru Impreza is a high-quality coupe for no-nonsense driving.

compartment with a lid that doubles as a comfortable armrest.

On the top of the dash is a mounted tray with a lid. The area is rather small and I really couldn't think of anything you could put in there, except maybe lunch or parking money. Maybe a couple of Kleenex or something; nothing more.

This five-passenger Impreza can accommodate five people easily without the use of a can opener. The four outboard passengers have three-point manual seat belts. The front passengers have height-adjustable belts as well. The center rear passenger has a lapbelt only.

I didn't like the front seats. They're fully reclining buckets. The rear seats are bench. Those I did like.

Also what I didn't like was the diagonal contrasting pattern that was a dif-

ferent color than the seats. The door panels had that same pattern melded on top. The contrast is too great, too overwhelming. They were comfortable, however.

The windshield wipers had aerodynamic fins attached that distracted me when working. They take up valuable visibility in a harder-than-normal rainstorm. Subaru outfitted the wipers that way to further give it a performance image.

My final concern is about the short-throw 5-speed manual transmission. On more than one occasion, I'd have it in first or second and advance to the next gear and it would almost jump. A fellow auto writer took it for a spin and agreed with me.

The Impreza 2.5 RS is powered by a (you guessed it) 2.5-liter 4-cylinder horizontally opposed boxer engine that's

Subaru's signature powerplant. It's a strong engine that gets you where you want to go in a hurry. The mileage is nothing to sneeze at, either: 22 mpg in the city, 28 on the highway.

At first I squawked at the price: \$19,690. I thought, well, that's a tad steep for a subcompact. Heck, you can almost get an Outback Sport for that (a shrewd friend did, too).

But you've got to look at all what's on the Impreza before you start yelling. By the way, that price includes destination and delivery and there are 50 options added. That's the price of the car, loaded to the max.

Let's see here: Map lights, air conditioning, power door locks, remote trunk release, power windows, tilt-adjustable steering column, driver's foot rest, 80-watt AM/FM cassette stereo with four

See Impreza 2.5 RS, Next Page

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SALE PRICE \$17,795* GM OPT II Deduct \$929.97
36 month Smart Lease \$279** per mo.

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