

Impreza:

in at the cheap end



Image courtesy of Gail Iovannino

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The problem manifests itself with a regular misfire at specific revs, often low down when under load like climbing a hill in a high gear.

Apart from that the electrics should be OK, although the central locking system is not immune from glitches and early cars can occasionally lock and unlock themselves when driving along, and sometimes they are prone to problems in the extreme cold.

If the brake warning light on the dash comes on, even though the brakes feel OK, check the bulbs as when they blow this can happen.

Mechanical components are generally robust, although it is worth having a look at the radiator on an early car, as they tend to go a bit porous on the drivers-side end and leak. If you are looking at a motor fresh in, open the expansion bottle in the front corner and be suspicious if it is empty.

While you are there, have a good look at the high pressure outlet for the power steering pump. The seals can go here, causing power steering fluid to leak down the front of the

block and dribble down on to the hot manifolds underneath.

Speaking of oil leaks, another problem which is not unknown is for the rocker cover gaskets to go soggy, with spots of oil dripping down onto the hot exhausts and smoking. It is a nuisance, but some cars seem to live with it for years before it becomes a real problem. If there is any paperwork with the car, don’t be surprised to see a note from a garage saying ‘investigated oil burning smell and found nothing wrong’ or something similar.

As for gearboxes, the early cars (pre-97) have a habit of crunching into second gear on fast changes, a problem Subaru sorted out after the 97 mid-life facelift. You can put 20,000 miles on an Impreza with a crunching second gear and it may never get worse and never got better, even if you change the gearbox oil.

Speaking of which, the gearbox has its own dipstick located between the intercooler and the turbo heat shield. There are differing opinions about whether or not it is worth changing

THE OLD SCHOOL SCOOBY HAS WON MANY ADMIRERS OVER THE YEARS. THIS IS WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Much has been written about the pace and grip of the classic-shaped Impreza and readers will no doubt be well aware of the car’s capabilities.

Now insurers prices are so low, relatively minor panel damage will be consigning vehicles to the recycling yards.

However, there is still a strong demand for these things amongst the public, so before reaching for the depollution equipment it is well worth considering repair and resale, or even hanging on to one for a while.

The Impreza story started in the late 1980s when Subaru decided to launch a mid-sized saloon with the ability to offer practical day to day use while being faster on rally stages than the larger Legacy. By 1990 Prodrive was working on the vehicle’s dynamics, while in Japan work on the styling had started. The silhouette, incidentally, is supposed to have been inspired by a waterfowl in flight.

The UK launch was in 1994, and by 1995 when Colin McRae took the World Rally Championship title, the vehicle’s sporting reputation was secured.

So what problems should you look out for with Imprezas? Generally they

are fairly tough despite the inevitable complexity which comes with getting more than 200BHP out of two litres.

With limited space either side of the block, there is scope for fun and games when replacing certain components such as coil packs on the early (pre-97) models. These little beggars have been the cause of many a mysterious misfire, and there are no lights on the dash to indicate when they are on the way out. The coil packs themselves are mounted directly on top of each spark plug, and to get at them the windscreen washer bottle must be removed, as must the induction pipe work on the driver’s side.





Images courtesy of Keith Telenino

the oil, but early cars will now be old enough that it is probably worth it if you intend to hang onto it. To put fresh oil in, use the dipstick's pipe and a funnel.

Turbos are water-cooled and should give a long life. While turbo timers used to be a fashionable aftermarket option, most owners think that driving the last few minutes of trip at low speeds gives good enough ram-air cooling to preserve the turbo.

INSIDE INFORMATION

Even the most enthusiastic owners are forced to admit that the Impreza's interior is not one of its strong points. Early cars had horrible hard blue cloth seats which make your arse go to sleep, and while leather was an option, the seat design was still uncomfortable for many. The post-97 cars are much better, but for some drivers the curvy bucket seats lack support in the lower



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GREY'S ANATOMY

There are some differences which can be used to quickly identify grey imports at a distance. From the front, UK cars have headlamp washer squirter and greys don't. From the back, as well as the aftermarket fog light dangling down, 4 door greys have a rear windscreen wiper, UK cars do not. A 2 door car will be a grey import unless it is a blue P1, a big-power car which has developed an unfortunate reputation for eating crankshafts. Despite this, they remain popular and command a much higher price than the normal 4 door UK cars.

back area, although there are so many different types of seat available it shouldn't be a problem to find suitable replacements. Interchangeability seems good across the whole 94-01 range.

Another annoyance on some vehicles is the baffling array of squeaks, creaks and rattles that can come from the trim. Glove boxes can hum and interior mirror fittings can buzz. One solution is to identify the offender, remove and spray with a dashboard cleaner type product – the type that will leave a liquid residue and act as a lubricant between squeaky surfaces. If rear windows squeak against the rubbers, nudge them down a tiny bit while driving along. Just remember to put the up again when parked.

These are minor gripes of course, which can be solved.

In 2001, the bug eyed shape took over. With a strange surprised look about its front end, as if a Nissan Micra has just been shoved up its back box, sales suffered and the new model only lasted two years before a hasty redesign. Subaru have been unable to settle on a design ever since.

Maybe the original was the best. It is still a rewarding car to drive, and there can be few modern vehicles which inspire such loyalty amongst owners. ■

Learn more at:

- www.scoobynet.co.uk
- www.sidc.co.uk
- www.gradea-subaru.co.uk



Image courtesy of Bill Martin

RACING LINE

No article about the Impreza would be complete without paying tribute to the late, great drivers who did so much to cement its reputation as a sporting icon. First Colin McRae, then Richard Burns bought glory to Subaru before tragedy struck them both. Now charitable foundations work in their respective names, see www.colinmrae.com and www.richardburnsfoundation.com for more information.

As well as these good causes, their names live on in the models which bear their name, the Series McRae and the RB5, both sought after by enthusiasts. The other limited edition UK model which was launched to celebrate rallying success was the Terzo, which, curiously, is the only model in the UK range which doesn't have folding down rear seats. There is a bewildering array of special editions, as the growth of the grey import market has served to demonstrate.

When it comes to tuning, the options are as big as your bank balance. It is rare to see a standard exhaust system still fitted, and induction kits are a common addition. Some owners seem to like the acoustic enhancement as much as the extra power. Beware oil-based air filters, which have developed a reputation as destroyers of lambda sensors. And sneezing dump valves are just annoying.

Standard cars are something of a rarity now, so if you find one in decent order it may be worth more than you think.



Image courtesy of John Stewart