

## 2010 SUBARU OUTBACK



The new Outback is based on the same platform as the new Legacy, which means all dimensions have grown except overall length, 2 cm shorter in the case of the Outback. This slight decrease does not stop the new, fourth-generation Outback from delivering more interior room—some 200 litres more, in fact—than the outgoing model. It should be noted that the Outback is now the only station wagon in the Legacy/Outback line-up. It is available in three versions, PZEV, 2.5i Sport and 3.6R. And, of course, all models come with all-wheel drive.

### **Interior and cargo area**

Access is easy. The seats are very comfortable, and the driving position is very good thanks to the tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel. Headroom and legroom are good, but the front passenger has to angle their legs to the left to be able to stretch them out completely.

The backseat is comfortable for just two; the shape of the seat and the hump of the transmission tunnel make the middle section very uninviting. Headroom and legroom are generous. When folded, the 60/40-split seatback slopes up slightly toward the front and leaves a large, deep space behind the front seats.

The cargo area is spacious, with 103 cm behind the rear seat when it's up. With the rear seat folded, there's 193 cm behind the front seats when they're adjusted for tall persons. Width is 108.5 cm and height, 75.5 cm. The luggage cover stores under the floor when it's not needed, which is a brilliant idea. The rear hatch opens high.

### **Convenience and safety features**

The cabin is very well finished in good-quality materials. Sound isolation against road noise needs improvement. There are several good storage spaces. The parking brake is now electronic, which frees up more space between the front seats for a roomy centre console.

Though the gauges and controls are well laid out, some controls are not lighted at night. Several of the radio and climate controls are a bit small. The relatively bulky satellite radio antenna is unsightly in its location on the upper right hand side of the windshield.

The heating system puts out a good level of heat fairly quickly. However, in our test vehicles, including the Legacy, after about 30 or 40 minutes of driving, the airflow was cooler at windshield level than at foot level in Auto and in Defrost/Head modes. Cool air on one's head and shoulders on a long drive becomes unpleasant. Additionally, no matter how it was adjusted, and unless it was completely closed, the vent on the right side of the steering wheel sent a stream of air towards the driver's right hand in Vent mode.

In our test vehicles, the windshield washers only started after an initial swipe of the wipers, which is not good for the wipers or for the windshield.

An interesting feature of the new Outback is roof rails with integrated crossbars that pivot 90 degrees when they're needed. They can support 68 kg but cannot be used as roof rails, Subaru warns. You therefore can not tie down an item placed perpendicularly on the crossbars because there'd be no space through which to thread a rope. This configuration is really only useful paired with a bike or other rack, or a luggage carrier.

Safety features include dual front, side and side curtain airbags, four-wheel disc brakes with ABS, stability control, and five head restraints. The middle head restraint on the rear seat does not adjust high enough to protect people of average height or more. Visibility is good in all directions except to the rear, on a three-quarter angle. Distances are hard to judge when backing up. In our test vehicles, the PZEV model's headlights were effective but the 3.6R version's lacked range. We also noted that the left headlight cut-off, in the low-beam position, is abrupt and that range is very short, so that the road is poorly illuminated, especially in a left turn.

In U.S. government crash tests, the Outback obtained five stars out of five for the protection of front occupants in a frontal collision and for the protection of all occupants in a side crash. It earned four stars for rollover resistance. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety awarded the Outback a Good rating, its highest, for roof strength, for driver protection in a frontal offset impact, and for all-occupant protection in a side or a rear impact.

### **Engine and transmission**

The engines, all boxer-type (horizontally opposed cylinders), are an important part of the Outback makeover. In fact, Subaru is looking to convince consumers that its all-wheel-drive vehicles are not only less thirsty than before but that they are just as fuel efficient as competing two-wheel-drive models. The 2.5-litre four-cylinder has been modified to improve performance and fuel efficiency. Also available is a "partial zero emissions vehicle" (PZEV) version of this engine, which uses a more sophisticated catalyser and other technology to lower emissions even more.

The 2.5-litre normally aspirated four-cylinder outputs 170 horsepower and 170 pound-feet of torque. Though that's enough to move the Outback along with relative ease in ordinary driving, it's only hardly so when passing, so the manoeuvre requires planning. With the 3.6-litre six-cylinder, which makes 256 horsepower and 247 pound-feet of torque, acceleration and pickup are energetic and practically instantaneous. This engine climbs easily through the gears and is well matched to the Outback. However, it would help if the throttle were more progressive when starting off.

The CVT transmission is rather unique in that it uses a chain instead of a belt. It is also the first time that such a transmission has been mounted longitudinally in an all-wheel-drive vehicle. In manual mode, the transmission lets you shift six "speeds". Though it generally functions very well, you can feel it "downshift" with a shudder at around 30-40 km/h when the torque converter disengages. At times, the shudder is quite noticeable. The five-speed automatic transmission that is mated to the six-cylinder engine is beyond reproach. The six-speed manual gearbox is easy and pleasant to use. All Outback models are equipped with a driver-activated Hill Holder System that holds the vehicle in place on slopes of five degrees or more. The system releases the brakes only when the driver applies the throttle.

Front-to-rear torque distribution differs with the transmission. With the manual transmission, torque is split 50/50 front-to-rear at all times. With the CVT, it is distributed 60/40, transferring to 50/50 in strong acceleration or as conditions require. With the five-speed transmission, the 45/55 torque split favours the rear wheels, moving to 50/50 in sharp acceleration or when wheel spin is detected. This all-wheel-drive system functions impeccably, at all times.

### **On the road**

The four-wheel independent suspension receives several modifications this year. To reduce noise and vibration, Subaru replaced the multilink rear-suspension system with a double-wishbone setup. The suspension also has increased wheel travel, the result of which is a very smooth ride. A firm reaction is noticeable at times, but generally speaking, the mix of suppleness and firmness delivers a nice trade-off between comfort and road holding. In fact, for a vehicle with 22 cm of ground clearance that lets it handle relatively difficult off-road conditions, the Outback holds the road surprisingly well—and it drives with a sturdy feel.

The power steering is well calibrated, stable and precise, but a bit slow. It delivers some road sensation. The turning radius is relatively short. The brakes are very powerful and resist well to fade.

### **Inspection**

Our inspection at a CAA-Quebec technical inspection centre showed that the Outback's platform and suspension are sturdy. Corrosion protection is not applied uniformly. The windshield washer fluid tank is located front and left of the engine compartment, not the best for a roadside fill-up. The opening under the front bumper is large enough for debris to get through and damage the air-conditioner condenser. The overhead camshafts are belt driven in the four-cylinder engine and chain driven in the six-cylinder.

## Conclusion

More sturdy, spacious, comfortable and refined than before, the Outback is once again the benchmark vehicle in the segment it created 15 years ago. It should sell well, especially since it is less expensive, and more fuel efficient, than the generation it replaces. It will be interesting to see how its new dimensions are perceived—a larger Outback may appeal to some and be off-putting for others.

**PROS:** roominess, comfort and handling, comfortable seats, effective all-wheel-drive system, powerful brakes, improved fuel efficiency

**CONS:** power (2.5-litre), CVT transmission sometimes abrupt, three-quarter-rear visibility, road noise, opening under front bumper, some controls are small

## 2010 SUBARU OUTBACK

**Engine:** 16-valve, 2.5-litre 4-cylinder; 24-valve, 3.6-litre 6-cylinder

**Horsepower:** 170 hp at 5,600 rpm; 256 hp at 6,000 rpm

**Torque:** 170 lb-ft at 4,000 rpm; 247 lb-ft at 4,400 rpm

**Transmission:** 6-speed manual; CVT; 5-speed automatic

**Suspension:** fully independent

**Brakes:** disc/disc

**Wheelbase:** 274 cm

**Length:** 278 cm

**Width:** 205 cm (with mirrors)

**Height:** 167 cm

**Weight:** 1,591 to 1,648 kg

**Tires:** 225/60R17

**Maximum towing capacity:** 1,360 kg

**Airbags:** dual front, plus two side and two curtain airbags

### Fuel consumption with 2.5-litre and CVT:

Natural Resources Canada rating:

City: 9.5 L/100 km (30 mpg)

Highway: 6.9 L/100 km (41 mpg)

Test result: 10.7 L/100 km (26 mpg)

Test temperature: -3°C to 10°C

**CO<sub>2</sub> emissions:** 3,864 kg/20,000 km

**Fuel tank capacity:** 70 litres

**Fuel requirement:** regular grade gasoline

### Acceleration (2.5-litre and CVT)

0–100 km/h: 9.9 seconds

60–100 km/h: 7 seconds

**Competition:** Chevrolet Equinox, Dodge Journey, Ford Edge, GMC Terrain, Honda Accord Crosstour, Hyundai Santa Fe, Kia Sorento, Toyota Venza, Volkswagen Passat Wagon

**Warranty:**

- Full basic coverage: 3 years/60,000 km
- Major components: 5 years/100,000 km
- Surface corrosion: 3 years/60,000 km
- Perforation damage: 5 years/unlimited km
- Emissions control system: 3 years/60,000 km (full coverage); 8 years/130,000 km (catalytic converter, electronic control module, onboard diagnostic system).

**Factory replacement parts:**

- Rear bumper: \$647
- Front brake disc: \$100
- Brake pads: \$114
- Muffler: \$500
- Front fender: \$240

**Price according to trim level:**

- PZEV: \$28,995
- 2.5i Sport: \$31,795
- 3.6R: \$35,695

**Main options:**

- Limited package: \$4,000 (2.5i); \$2,800 (3.6R)
- Limited package and multimedia option: \$6,300 (2.5i); \$5,100 (3.6R)
- CVT transmission: \$1,200

**Prices as tested:** \$30,195; \$38,495

**Freight and preparation:** \$1,525

**Dealers:** Quebec: 28      Canada: 95

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