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## Latest Subaru Outback 4WD Estate – Road Test

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2018 Subaru Outback 4WD estate - Safe, solid and soul-less...

...says David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

The updated Subaru Outback continues to be a 4WD crossover estate, conservatively styled and still very much a niche model from a niche brand but with a loyal customer following

For the 2018 model year the range is limited to just two variants, the £29,995 SE and £33,010 SE Premium. Both use a non-turbo 2.5 litre, four-cylinder 'Boxer' flat-four cylinder 175 hp petrol engine mated with a CVT automatic transmission. They both have Subaru's



legendary all-wheel drive system, plus X-Mode and Hill Descent Control for fairly serious off-road driving capabilities.

The latest Outback has a five star Euro NCAP safety rating thanks in part to its updated EyeSight driving support 180-degree camera system which now includes Lane Keep Assist. This function is in addition to the previous features of Adaptive Cruise Control, Lead Vehicle Start Assist, Lane Sway and Departure Warning, Pre-Collision Braking and Pre-Collision Throttle Management. Steering Responsive Headlights which illuminate corners whilst turning the steering wheel make up the sophisticated and improved safety features and for good measure the prices of the models have not changed from last year's line-up, although the 2.0 litre diesel versions are no longer available.

At 4,820 mm (15.81 ft) in length the Outback is a large and solid feeling well equipped estate car with higher 200 mm (7.87 in) ground clearance for off-road driving. It has a boot space of 559 litres (19.74 cu.ft) but this goes up to 1,848 litres (65.26 cu.ft) with the three rear seats folded, and for good measure it will tow up to 2,000 kg (4,409 lb). Living in The Cotswolds I see a considerable amount of these niche vehicles, they are more 'country' than urban living vehicles and an alternative choice to the now commonplace SUVs.

Despite the latest 2018 exterior styling, new grille, front bumper, door mirror and headlights, the Outback looks a solid but 'blunt' offering. It is a conservative choice in terms of 'looks'. It's not flashy and for some it lacks the must-have kerb appeal of say similar crossover estates as the Volvo V90 Cross Country, VW Passat Alltrack, Vauxhall Insignia Country Tourer, Skoda Superb Estate 4x4 and Audi's A6 Allroad Estate.

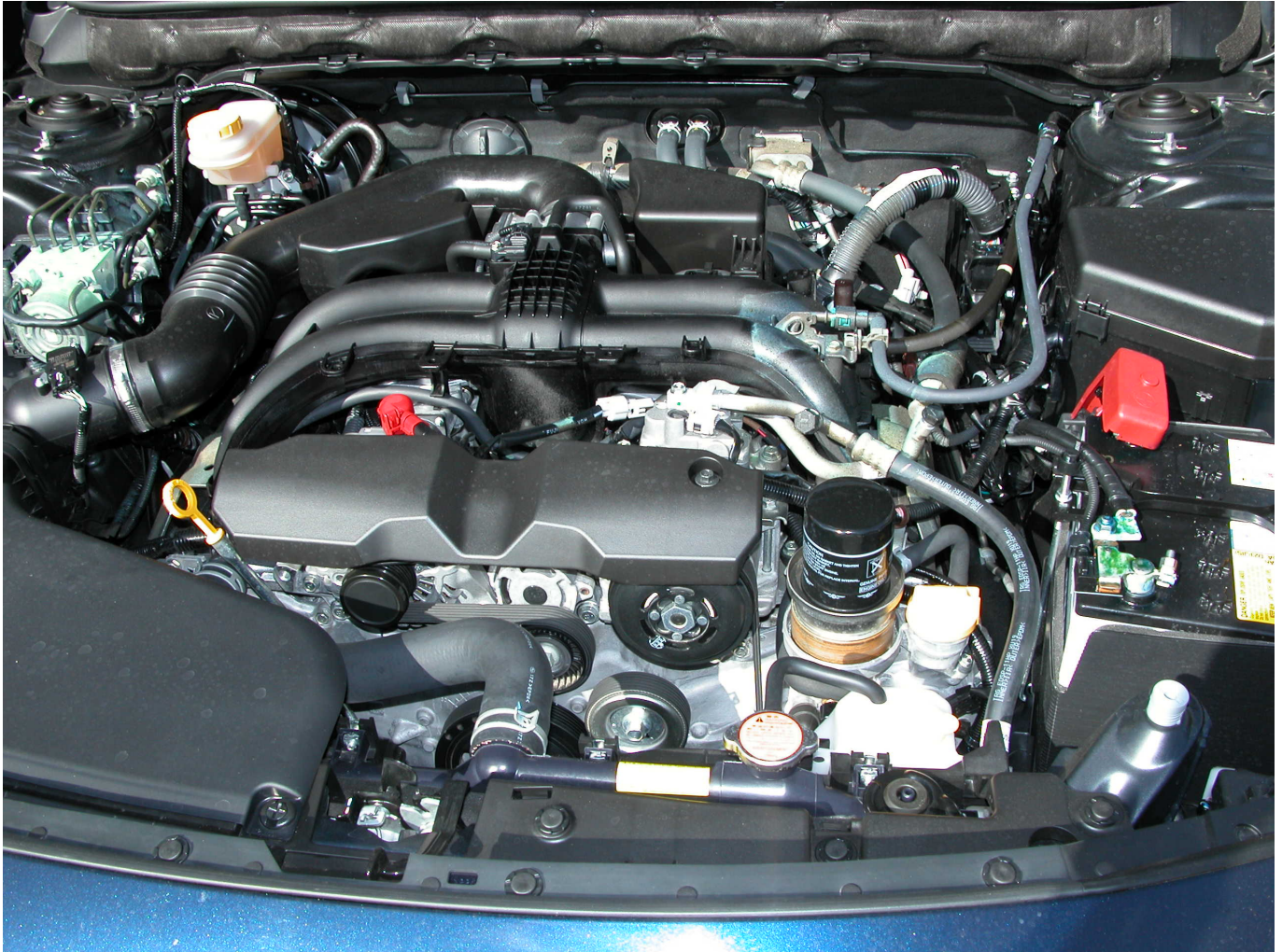
Inside is where the latest Outback impresses most but it still remains traditional 'old-school'. However, the quality is high and it feels solid and well put together with no squeaks or rattles, and with a reassuring 'clunk' as the doors are closed. New decorative gloss black trim inserts with silver surrounds add a touch of sparkle to the overall front interior appearance and the centrally positioned new 8.0-inch touchscreen for the SE Premium version I tried, 'lifts' the appearance of the dark and solid looking front fascia panel. In the



rear is seating for three adults with ample legroom and there are enough storage compartments and pockets throughout to make it user-friendly for business or family use.

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As for spec both SE and SE Premium levels are comprehensive. The SE version has a 6.5-inch touchscreen with sat-nav, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity, fabric upholstery, heated front seats, air-con, electronic handbrake, reversing camera and outside are 17-inch alloy wheels and LED headlights. The SE Premium spec additions include 18-inch alloy wheels, leather upholstery, memory functions for the driver's seat, sunroof, power operate tailgate and that easy to use and good to look at 8.0-inch touchscreen. Thankfully both versions have easy to use heating and ventilation controls which are not operated via the touchscreen. However the numerous controls are scattered around the driver's cockpit and some are positioned low down and not easy to see or use. The safety related EyeSight technology is excellent making driving support easy and most importantly safe. It's a nice big estate to live with if not exactly exciting to see on your driveway.



At the heart of this big 4WD crossover estate is the engine and drivetrain and its 2.5-litre 'Boxer' horizontally opposed four-cylinder petrol engine design is where this crossover estate differs from any of its competitors. The 'Boxer' engine design is a hallmark feature of the Subaru brand. Its low flat-four design means it has a lower centre of gravity and is mounted further back in the engine compartment than a conventional unit. In the event of a serious front end collision it transitions beneath the passenger compartment for added safety. The unique 'punch and counterpunch' rotational cycle of the horizontally opposed unit scores highly for smoothness, low vibrations and noise. Power output is 175hp at a relatively high 5,800 rpm with a 'gutsy' 235 Nm (173 lb.ft) of torque at 4,000rpm. The power delivery is linear and responsive; it felt very strong for mid range acceleration. Top



speed is 123 mph and zero to 62 mph takes 10.2 seconds.

The official Combined Cycle fuel economy is 38.7 mpg and my week of test driving returned an acceptable 34.8 mpg which given its size, weight and 4WD system combined with the CVT auto gearbox, I thought was commendable.

However running costs in terms of taxation are not so good with CO2 emissions of 166 g/km meaning the First year VED road tax cost is £515 before the Standard rate from year two onwards of £140 is applied. Company car users will pay a high 34% Benefit-in-Kind tax. Insurance however is a relatively low Group 20E given its on/off road driving potential. Warranty is a commendable five years/100,000 miles.

Drive to all four wheels is through a CVT Lineartronic auto transmission which unusually also includes a torque converter to smooth out gearchanges. These changes in ratio are not particularly fast but they are smooth and suit the big estate's driving performance. Drive to all four wheels is through Subaru's signature Symmetrical split system which is always operational, providing grip where it's needed most all of the time, giving balanced confident traction.



## VERDICT

Ride comfort is another bonus of this big estate's huge and versatile capabilities. It's not the most agile of handling vehicles of its type but it is one of the smoothest and nothing seemed to unsettle its composed ride and surefooted handling. It's never going to excite the driver, rather like its styling it is what it is; unexciting and you could say bland, but it never gets flustered and it's not flash.

**For:** Roomy, comfortable, high safety equipment and driving support aids, solidly built, strong engine with impressive on/off-road traction, good warranty.



Against: Dull conservative styling inside and out, lacks kerb appeal, high tax costs.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

2018 Subaru Outback 2.5i, SE Premium, Lineartronic auto, 4WD estate.

Engine/transmission: 2.5 litre, 'Boxer' horizontally opposed four cylinder, normally aspirated petrol, 175 hp, 235 Nm (173 lb.ft) of torque, CVT auto with 4WD.





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Performance: 123 mph, 0-62 mph 10.2 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 38.7 mpg (34.8 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 166 g/km, VED road tax £515/£140, BiK company car tax 34%.

Insurance Group: 20E.

Warranty: Five years/100,000-miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,820 mm (15.81 ft), W 1,820 mm (5.97 ft), H 1,605 mm (5.27 ft), wheelbase 2,745 mm (9.01 ft), boot/load space 559 to 1,848 litres (19.74 to 65.26 ft), braked towing weight 2,000 kg (4,409 lb), five doors/five seats.