

Cars for Dogs: 2009 Subaru Forester

Editor of Auto Restorer magazine gives the scoop on the best new cars for dog owners.

By Ted Kade

Subaru has long had a reputation for making practical, rugged, all-wheel-drive vehicles for folks who like to spend their weekends and vacations in the great outdoors.

The redesigned Forester crossover is all-new for 2009 with a bolder appearance and a number of attributes that hold strong appeal for dog owners. It has additional, easily-accessible cargo space, a longer wheelbase for improved interior roominess and ride quality, and generous ground clearance, among other features agreeable to people and their furry companions. So if it's time for a new vehicle, and you've never set foot in or near a Subaru dealership, consider the following:

Cargo capacity: 33.5 cubic feet, which grows to 68.3 cubic feet with the rear seats down. Cargo area height is 33.9 inches; width between the rear wheelhouses is 42.2 inches; cargo area lift-over height is a low 27.4 inches. Towing capacity is 2,400 pounds.

Safety: Forester received the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's top five-star ratings in all crash tests and four stars in the rollover test. It has front air bags, front-seat side-impact air bags, and curtain side air bags with rollover sensor. All seating positions have three-point seat belts, and the outboard positions are height-adjustable, a helpful feature for securing your dog's travel harness. The rear seat child-restraint anchor system can also be used for securing your canine friend.

The basics: Forester is powered by a 2.5-liter 4-cylinder engine that puts out 170 horsepower. Power moves through a 5-speed manual or 4-speed automatic transmission, and all Foresters have all-wheel drive. The vehicle stops via 4-wheel disc brakes with anti-lock brake system. EPA city/highway mpg estimates range from 20/27 for a five-speed manual Forester to 19/24 for one with an automatic and turbocharged engine.

Extra touches: Three 12-volt power points, one in the dash, one in the console, and one in the cargo area; four tie-downs and two grocery bag hooks in the cargo area; cargo light; four rear-seat area heater ducts. The rear seat-backs and cargo floor are carpeted, and the interior now includes double-stitched fabrics and higher-grade plastics, making the vehicle more resistant to doggie wear and tear.

Pricing starts at \$19,995.

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