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AUTOFOCUS

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# Auto Sunday

## Legacy expertly handles snow, rain

BY ANN M. JOB

For The Associated Press

Subaru's Legacy mid-size sedan grew for 2010, but its price tag didn't.

In fact, the newly styled and enlarged five-passenger Legacy has a starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, of \$20,660 and ranks as the lowest-priced mid-size, all-wheel drive sedan on the U.S. market.

The 2010 Legacy also is noteworthy for its fuel mileage rating of 23 miles per gallon in city driving and 31 mpg on the highway when equipped with continuously variable transmission. This CVT adds \$1,000 to the base price.

The fuel economy estimate from the U.S. federal government is an improvement from last year's Legacy and makes the new 2010 model the best mid-size all-wheel-drive sedan in gas mileage in the country.

Many buyers might overlook Subaru when looking for a family sedan because they don't live in wintry climates and figure they don't need all-wheel drive, which is standard on all Subarus.

But with Subaru pricing the Legacy competitively against mid-size sedans that don't have this feature, it makes the argument of "why pay for all-wheel drive when I may not need it" virtually moot.

Consider that a 2010 Toyota Camry with power going only to the front wheels, not all four wheels, has a retail starting price of \$20,145, or just \$515 less than a base Legacy. The two cars have nearly the same horsepower from their four-cylinder engines — 170 horses in the Legacy and 169 in the Camry.

There's also the fact that all-wheel drive isn't just for snowy roads. It can provide better traction on rainy surfaces and in other low-grip situations.

The Legacy is the top sedan of the company, but it had been a bit snug inside over the years, particularly in the back seat compared with the top mid-size sedan sellers like the Camry.

This has been addressed for 2010. The new model rides on a new platform and has a wheelbase that's 3.2 inches longer than its predecessor. The car also is 3.2 inches taller and 3.6 inches wider.

The improved interior dimensions plus scalloped front seat backs add four inches of rear-seat legroom to the Legacy, which already had superior front-seat legroom of some 43 inches.

In the back seat, legroom measures 37.8 inches, which is closer to the Camry's 38.3 inches.



COURTESY OF SUBARU

**The Subaru Legacy 2.5i has improved interior dimensions and rear-seat legroom for 2010.**

### At a glance

**Price as tested:** \$22,660

**Engine:** 2.5-liter, single overhead cam, horizontally opposed four cylinder

**City/highway fuel economy:** 23/31 miles per gallon

**Length:** 186.4 inches

**Wheelbase:** 108.3 inches

**Curb weight:** 3,384 pounds

**Built:** Lafayette, Ind.

## This tiny car proved bigger wasn't always better ... or quicker

BY OTTO STEIN

Wheelbase Communications

Though created to fill a need for efficient, inexpensive wheels, British Motor Corp.'s Mini became an overnight fashion statement and a cultural icon in the late 1950s.

It's hard-to-believe reign lasted decades, but the proof is in the fact that the Mini — although in a highly revised form — came back with a new body and a similar (but sportier) mission in 2003.

When the car was launched, it was supposed to be an answer to fears that the global supply of oil would be reduced to a trickle. It was 1956 during the Suez Crisis when Britain, along with a number of other countries, had succumb to gas shortages and invoked rationing. What was needed was a small car that was cheap to own and good on gas.

That's it? That's all? Little did anyone know it would become the coolest car in the world — the ultimate in front-wheel-drive chic — racking up sales that topped five million over a period spanning four decades.

The first Mini rolled off the assembly line on Aug. 26, 1959, to rather lackluster reviews. The car was beset with a raft of problems, including water leaks, faulty clutches and transmissions. But the public loved the little box on wheels, which debuted under two names: Morris Mini Minor; and the Austin Seven (BMC owned both the Morris and Austin brands). The two were sold side-by-side for a decade before the car simply became the Mini.

This sales sensation was designed by the legendary Alec Issigonis — later to become Sir Alec — either on a napkin or a tablecloth. Take your pick. The idea was to design the smallest possible car that would hold four adults plus some luggage. It had to be economical to operate, yet fun to drive.

Issigonis's rough sketch turned out to be uncannily close to the real thing. And the radical "wheel-at-each-corner" design remained the same for decades.

In a major departure from tradition, the car boasted front-wheel drive, a four-cylinder transversely mounted

### Fine Lines

The original Mini

engine, tiny 10-inch wheels and a gearbox mounted under the engine as part of the oil pan. The design allowed for compact external dimensions with an amazing amount of interior room.

Shortly after its debut, the cheap-and-cheerful Mini came to the attention of famed race-car builder John Cooper, who immediately saw the potential for a sportier version of the car.

Cooper had found success in Formula Three open-wheel racing in the early 1950s by building cars with the engine placed behind the driver, a revolutionary concept at the time.

But many in the racing establishment doubted that the layout would work on the larger Formula One cars. The skeptics were silenced in 1958 when Stirling Moss drove a Cooper to victory in the Grand Prix of Argentina. It was the first World Championship win for a rear-engined car. Within three years, rear-mounted engines were the standard for all F1 cars, as is still the case today.

Despite the glitz and glamour of Formula One, Cooper wanted to create a fun, sporty car for people on small budgets. In 1961 he convinced BMC to allow him to develop a performance-oriented version of the Mini called the Cooper and, eventually, three versions of the Cooper S were built. The most potent of these came with a 76-horsepower 1.3-liter engine. Base Minis came with less than half the power (34 horses) from a tiny(er) 848 c.c. engine. All Coopers came with wider wheels and tires and disc brakes.

For his efforts, Cooper was rewarded the princely sum of two British pounds (about \$4) for each car sold.

Cooper's souped-up Mini was an instant success. It became a car for everyone from celebrities to the guy next door.

Soon, entertainers Paul McCartney, John Lennon and Peter Sellers were driving the Cooper S. Even Queen Elizabeth II was photographed taking a spin. The car had become a must-have for the



# MINI COOPER



After a run of more than 40 years, the Mini was reincarnated for 2003.

trendy jet-setters of the Swinging '60s.

It didn't hurt that the Mini was also an instant success as a race car, becoming the first British auto to win the European Rally championship and taking the checkered flag three times between 1964 and '67 at the Monte Carlo Rally, which was run in the winter. Legendary Austrian racer Nicki Lauda drove a Mini to his first competition victory, as did Graham Hill and Ken Tyrrell.

In 1969, the Mini gained an even bigger cult following with the release of the movie *The Italian Job* (which starred Michael Caine and Noel Coward), when the little red, white and blue cars zoomed through the streets of Turin at death-defying speeds in a daring escape sequence in which robbers fled with a stash of gold bullion.

By the early 1970s, Cooper's association with the Mini was over. BMC had morphed into British Leyland Motors (1968), and the bean counters were hard at work adjusting the bottom line. The Cooper name was dropped in an effort to save a few quid.

In 1990, Rover, which then owned the marque, made a valiant effort to relaunch the Mini Cooper and it continued production until October 2000 with little success. An era had come to a close, punctuated by the death of John Cooper on Christmas Eve that year.

Playing on the rich history of the Mini, BMW secured the rights to both it and the Cooper name and resurrected the marque in 2003, designing it with the many of the same styling cues and engineering principles that made the original such a hit. From all indications, John Cooper, would approve.

## Anti-lock brakes are vital for motor home

**Q.** I own a 1998 Chevy chassis motor home that has a lit ABS (brake) light. The repair facility said they come up with a diagnostic code C0065, brake pressure modulator fault, which would require replacement of the ABS pump/modulator assembly. This is quite expensive. The brakes work OK without the ABS. Do you suggest a second opinion?

**A.** The diagnosis for this fault code is pretty straightforward; there are only a few tests to run and you can narrow it down to ABS (anti-lock brake system) modulator assembly pretty fast. If you have confidence and trust in the shop you are dealing with, I see no need for a second opinion. If you have any doubt in their ability, by all means get a second opinion.

You are correct, it is an expensive repair. However, I believe skid control from anti-lock brakes is important, especially on a larger vehicle like a motor home. Don't take any chances. You should get this repaired.

**Q.** I own a 2002 Pontiac Grand Prix and lately I have noticed the heater fan only blows on the highest speed. I have been dealing with it during the nice weather but now that I need to have heat I don't want to have hot air blasting at me all the time. What could be causing this and is it expensive to fix?

**A.** The problem you are having is actually a fairly common problem on this model — and many others, for that matter. The most common culprit is what we call a "Blower Resistor." This part dials down the power going to the heater fan, which is what gives you the different speeds. Sometimes the wiring connector going to it needs to be replaced as well, but in most cases the new resistor is all that is needed. Typically this is a fairly simple repair that does not cost much.

**Q.** My wipers chatter when it is just raining slightly. This is very annoying. The blades are not that old and look to be in pretty good shape. Any ideas?

**A.** This has been a problem on my vehicle as well so I know the annoyance you are talking about. The bad thing is it stops raining so you forget about it until it does it the next time, and so you end up just living with it. Here are some ideas you can try.

Have your windshield treated with a product called Aquapel or, if you can't find that, you can use Rain-X or the like. I think the Aquapel lasts longer. You can do this yourself or have your shop do it for you.

The other thing you will want to do is replace the wiper blades if they are six months old or older.

If you do these two things I am pretty confident the next time you run your wipers in a light rain you won't have to put up with the chatter of the wipers dragging across your windshield.

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