



# Subaru Impreza WRX

Better isn't always better. **by Robert Cumberland**



**THE SMOOTHLY INTEGRATED HOOD** scoop is nice, but it is the only outward sign on the whole car that this is a performance model.

**CARELESS SURFACE DEVELOPMENT** MAKES the grille appear to sag at the center. The lower part is hidden by the bumper.

**OUTER CORNERS OF THE bumper fascia** protrude like 1960s aerodynamic devices but are too small to have any significant effect.

**DRIVING LAMPS** RECALL THOSE ON the Renault Mégane Sport, a car less capable than the WRX but with far more convincing styling. Maybe Subaru should have copied more of it.

**THIS RIB** WOULD BE MUCH better, despite its amorphous origin on the front fender, were it not broken by stupid finger indents behind the door handles.

Like cars that polarize, designs that are loved and hated with equal intensity. The shocking little Ford Ka egg is one such design that has survived essentially unmodified in Europe for a dozen years. The platypus-faced 1998 Fiat Multipla was another brilliantly polarizing shocker, but after a few years, it was totally revised from the base of the windshield forward, becoming a banal and uninteresting shape like a dozen other Renault Scénic rip-offs. Fiat's restyling kept the advantages of its flat-sided, wide, short passenger space but lost my enthusiasm. I don't know if it sells any better now, but I doubt it.

Subaru's Impreza WRX rally car in civilian form was another controversial, off-the-wall design. It looked like nothing else on the market, but only those who knew and cared about its World Rally Championship achievements

embraced its clumsy styling, awkward appendages, and front-wheel-drive econobox proportions.

Subaru wants to sell more Imprezas, so its designers have smoothed out, homogenized, and, alas, banalized its shapes, retaining only the huge hood scoop from the previous WRX, albeit in much more refined form. Result: ho-hum. Here we have one of the world's great high-performance cars clumsily disguised as a downmarket family vehicle with feeble aspirations toward Korean chic. Visually, it has literally nothing to

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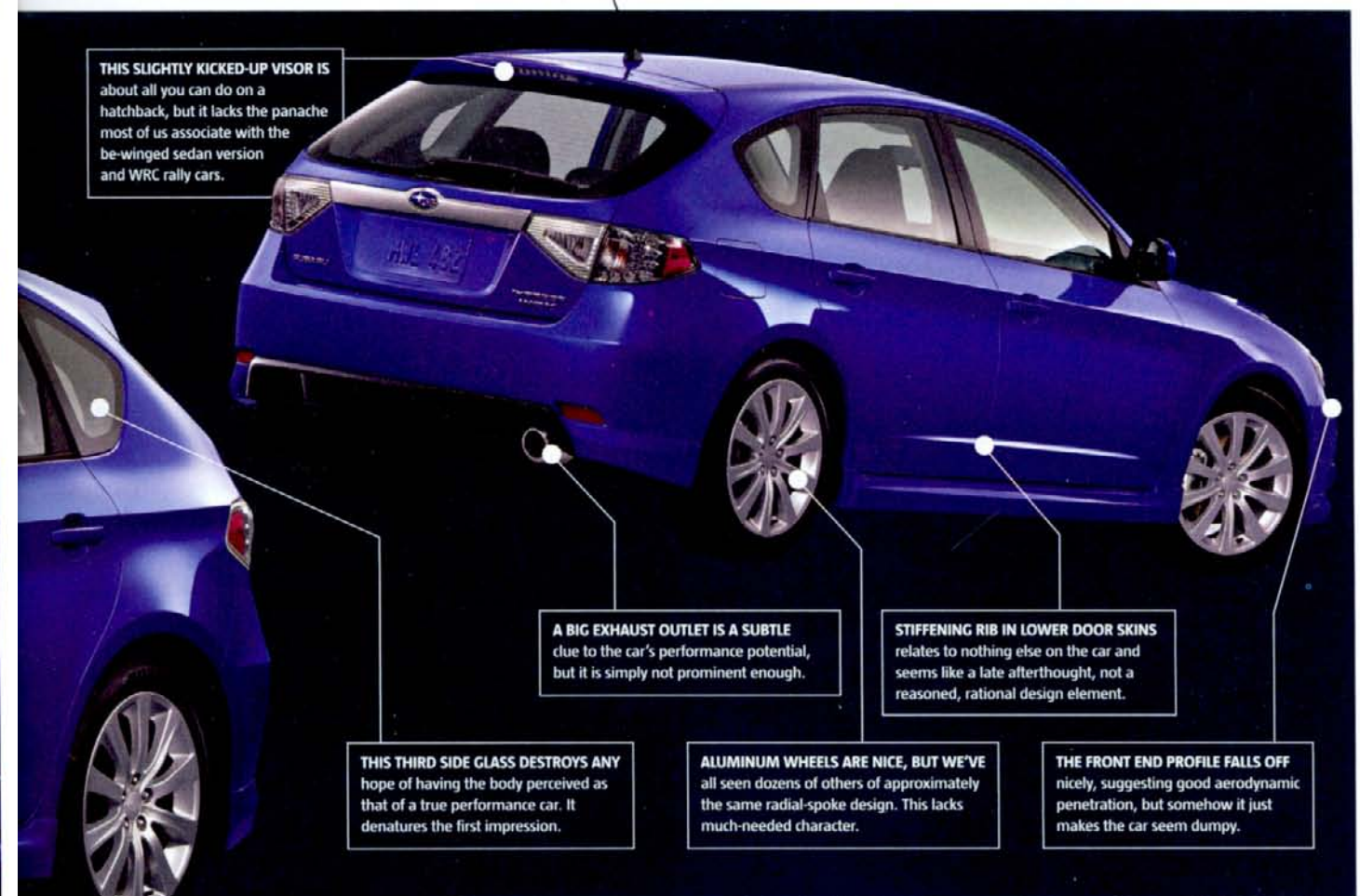
## COOL DETAIL

**ENERGY EFFICIENT, DESIGN IGNORANT** LED lamps are cool both thermally and technically, in that they react more quickly than incandescent bulbs and last far longer in service. But used as they are on the WRX, they are simply dorky: a collection of pox marks that spoil what otherwise looks like a Ford back end.



recommend it. Most of the details that could have been nice are not. Why that should be so is one of those imponderables rarely answered, but usually it's the responsibility of the design-ignorant upper management people, not the design staff.

Consider the crisp fold in the side sheetmetal that starts from nowhere on the front fender, then runs back to the taillights, rising all the way. It's a decent surface detail, but its highlight is broken twice by finger-space indents behind the door handles. Those handles could have been placed a bit lower, saving the rib, or on the rib peak itself, to make one think that they were origin points for the line. There are clumsier solutions than the



**THIS SLIGHTLY KICKED-UP VISOR** IS about all you can do on a hatchback, but it lacks the panache most of us associate with the be-winged sedan version and WRC rally cars.

**A BIG EXHAUST OUTLET** IS A SUBTLE clue to the car's performance potential, but it is simply not prominent enough.

**STIFFENING RIB** IN LOWER DOOR SKINS relates to nothing else on the car and seems like a late afterthought, not a reasoned, rational design element.

**THIS THIRD SIDE GLASS** DESTROYS ANY hope of having the body perceived as that of a true performance car. It denatures the first impression.

**ALUMINUM WHEELS** ARE NICE, BUT WE'VE all seen dozens of others of approximately the same radial-spoke design. This lacks much-needed character.

**THE FRONT END PROFILE** FALLS OFF nicely, suggesting good aerodynamic penetration, but somehow it just makes the car seem dumpy.

one chosen, no doubt, but there are also any number of better ones. I suspect that the body engineers are responsible for this stylistic atrocity, but who outside the company can really know?

There is this about funny-looking cars: if they are really superior in some way, it's easy to overlook bad styling. The old WRX was a winner. It looked—and was—fast and capable, so who cared if it was really ugly?

The newest WRX is just a plump, boring shape, and even if it is superior to the old car in performance and comfort—as assistant editor Sam Smith writes on page 106—on balance, it loses more by abandoning its aggressive funkiness than it gains in becoming more like all the other cars in its class... minus their style. The only thing going for this WRX as a performance icon is the outrageous hood scoop, and that is simply not enough.



**THERE IS NOT THE LEAST** shadow of performance styling for the steering wheel. It looks, and is, like a boring economy-car part, slightly enlivened by control buttons on its spokes.

**SMALL NICHE MOLDED** into the upper glare shield is a visually interesting dust catcher.

**CURVED LINE SWEEPING** above passenger's knees is nice, but it dead-ends at the door panel. Why?

**THE ONLY CLUE** IN THIS SEA of gray plastic and fabric that this might be a performance car is the fairly pronounced side bolsters in the seat backrests.