

“The needle stops rising at 140mph, but where are you going to drive that fast in Britain anyway?”



Subaru BRZ

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The Subaru BRZ's heritage can be traced to the Toyota 2000 GT from the late 1960s. It was a sexy, front-engine, rear-wheel-drive sports car and demonstrated that Japanese automakers could produce a sports car to rival those in Europe.

Fast forward to 2014 and the Japanese-made Subaru BRZ is as stimulating as that classic ever was - and it punches just as hard.

Under the hood there's a 2.0-litre engine mated to a six speed gearbox. 197 horses united with the BRZ's fine sense of balance make it one of the most appealing sports cars around. It's even more fun, and far more raw, than the popular Mazda MX-5.

0-62mph arrives in 7.6 seconds; that doesn't sound particularly extraordinary these days, although I guarantee you it feels brisk. The needle stops rising at 140mph, but where are you going to drive that fast in Britain anyway? These figures aren't important - it's all about the feelings the car sets free - and the sensations you experience behind the wheel of the Subaru are always thrilling.

Indeed, the BRZ puts a smile on your face the moment you slither into the accommodating driver's seat and close your hands around the chunky, leather steering wheel. This amused facial expression soon transforms into a cheesy grin when you slot into first gear using the stumpy gearstick, then set off on your own amusement park ride.

On the move, the Subaru has a low centre of gravity, so it negotiates bends as though it's on rails. But it can demand you give it a good hiding sometimes; subsequently you need to have your eye on the ball. The steering is so quick to respond that it's easy to meander over the white line if you're momentarily unfocused.

The rear end can get fidgety in wet weather too, but that makes the drive all the more exciting. There's certainly no manoeuvring this sports

coupé with your pinky on the wheel - it's a motor that needs to be kept in check. And after you finish your ride in the Subaru you almost feel as if you've been to the gym. It's gruelling to be in charge of - but in a satisfying way.

Another tick in the box for the BRZ is that it's not expensive. At £22,495, the entry level SE model, on test here, is affordable enough to be bought as a second 'fun car' for those days away from work.

Forget taking anyone other than a front seat passenger with you though - the rear 'seats' are too tiny to be used realistically. But who cares about that when you have such a fabulous looking set of wheels? To be frank, you won't want to stop giving the car a rub down. Heavens, I even gave my test car a polish to show it off in its best light.

Finally, be ready for people to ask what you're driving. Don't fret; they won't be concerned about you - just the car. I was even asked if I was in the 'latest' Toyota MR2 - even though the coupé clearly has 'Subaru BRZ' scrawled on it. But at least curiosity is being demonstrated - and that's got to be encouraging for Subaru.

PROS

• Fun • Balance • Looks • Price

CONS

• Rear seats

FAST FACTS

- Max speed: 140 mph
- 0-62 mph: 7.6 secs
- Combined mpg: 36.2
- Engine: 1998cc flat four boxer petrol
- Max. power (bhp): 197 at 7000 rpm
- Max. torque (lb.ft): 151 at 6400 rpm
- CO2: 181 g/km
- Price: £22,495 on the road