

SUBARU FORESTER

Consummate exponents of the art of high-performance 4WD systems, Subaru long ago transferred the concept of a flat-four engine boasting a low centre of gravity and excellent torque characteristics driving all four wheels to everyday estates and pick-ups. The Forester is a modern extension of this theme, exhibiting impressive off-road agility in spite of its mild-mannered appearance, along with superb ride comfort and great handling, a feature most welcome in the rally-bred S Turbo introduced late in 1998.

All versions of the Forester have remote central locking and electric windows, stereo and roof rail; examples fitted with the All Weather pack are more desirable since these include air conditioning, heated front seats and a huge electric sunroof.

With the recent arrival of an upgraded model forecourts are heavy with traded-in older models, so easing prices. The Forester, though rather bland in style compared with the Freelander, is a comfortable, well-appointed five-seater estate with a big boot, the perfect small family car for country dwellers where the permanent four-wheel drive will take care of tractor-muddied roads on the way to the shops as well as field crossings at point-to-point meetings.



A good low-mileage base GLS will cost anything from £5,000 to £10,000 depending on age, an All Weather version excellent value at around £800 more for a W-plate. The thirsty S Turbo ought to be a cheap purchase second-hand, but they're so reliable and so much fun that desirability hasn't dwindled, so even an early example will set you back £8000 – over £16,000 for a year-old model but likely to hold its value well.

RATING

PRICE RANGE	£5000-£16,000
ON-ROAD	●●●●●
OFF-ROAD	●●●●●
PRACTICALITY	●●●●●
AVAILABILITY	●●●●●
VALUE FOR MONEY	●●●●●

SUZUKI VITARA ESTATE

Looking a little dated now and having to contend with growing ranks of smart modern rivals the Vitara may be losing appeal as an outright fashion statement, but it's still hard to beat as a competent family estate with real off-road agility.

The first five-door versions appeared in 1991, in high-specification J LX SE form which includes central locking and electric windows – pay £1000 for a well-worn high-miler to trash off road, £4500 for a clean '97 model for the junior school run. A more basic model, the JX, lacking the electric windows and central locking, joined the range in '93, suitably priced now from £2000-£4000 depending on age and mileage – accessible but ultimately not as good value as the J LX SE. Look out for the X-EC special edition of July '93, a mainly cosmetic enhancement with metallic paint and body colour spare wheel cover, but it also has remote central locking – expect to pay around £3500 for a clean one. Turbodiesels are usually good news, the lump in the Vitara is a rough and sluggish performer by modern-day standards, but it's a willing worker and has obviously impressed previous owners since 2.0D have held their value better than most and you'll pay around £5500 for a well-maintained, smart early example from '96 –



note that first imports came with the four-speed automatic, a five-speed manual version appeared a little later and will now cost £200-£300 less than the automatics.

The 2.0-litre V6 version that accompanied the diesel from 1996 is an extravagance in this generally workmanlike car, but good value now because it's nippy, very smooth and well-equipped for the money – no more than £6000 for a '98 example.

RATING

PRICE RANGE	£2000-£8000
ON-ROAD	●●●●●
OFF-ROAD	●●●●●
PRACTICALITY	●●●●●
AVAILABILITY	●●●●●
VALUE FOR MONEY	●●●●●