



## *Weekly Car Dealers Newsletter*

November 26, 2007

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# Week of November 26, 2007

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**BOWTOX'D AND BOWFLEX'D SUBARU  
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FLINT: NEXT YEAR—BETTER OR WORSE?  
STI SAMPLE**

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**BOWTOX'D AND BOWFLEX'D SUBARU** Subaru keeps on tweaking their almost-loved SUV, which begs the question: is evolution better than revolution?

Let's cut to the chase: the prices are the same. That's the major revelation sitting on the sculptured hood of the 2008 Subaru Tribeca, a vehicle that features some real improvements over its predecessor.

As a fan of the previous model's front-end design, I'm sad to see Subaru embrace simplicity — the nose now looks too much like a Chrysler Pacifica. Andreas Zapatinas, the former Subaru design chief credited with the Tribeca's design, left the company last year — opening the door for a re-evaluation of the old model's aircraft-themed snout.

The whole vehicle flows from the new upright chrome grille, flanked by standard High-Intensity Discharge headlights. Behind the lights, Subaru engineers have worked some sort of magic on the engine itself.

It's still a flat six, but enlarged to 3.6 litres, producing 23 per cent more low to mid-range torque. Horsepower is up to 256 — and despite more power and increased size, the motor has been tuned to run on regular fuel (the old model required premium). It's also the exact same size as the previous motor...

In between the redesigned engine and requisite all-wheel-drive system is a new five-speed automatic gearbox with manual shift control. Shifts are pretty smooth, but progress overall is just... quiet. Maybe the new engine revs less, maybe the powertrain produces fewer vibrations, but the whole package is very Lexus-like as far as refinement is concerned.

Also of note is a tweaked rear suspension, which is a rare (for a soft-roader) double-wishbone setup. It helps minimize intrusion into the cabin, while providing excellent on-road dynamics.

Inside, the interior is diametrically opposed to the exterior and pretty much unchanged. There's more glass, which gives the swoopy and surprisingly ergonomic interior better light. As before, a predominantly silver dashboard and switches swathes across the length of the cabin, "melting" in the middle to give a cockpit feel. It won best interior a few years back, and it hasn't aged one bit — it's simply a great place to spend time.

Oh, and Subaru tweaked access to the third row seats, meaning the rear bench is no longer the exclusive domain of Pilates instructors.

To top it off, all Tribecas come with a 36-month/60,000km no-charge scheduled maintenance plan — basically making your only expense fuel and car washes.

So back to the (unchanged) pricing: The lineup has been simplified to three models, with the five-passenger version ringing in at \$41,995. Above that is the Limited Package with a leather interior at \$45,145, and the seven-passenger Tribeca Premier Package with leather, third-row seating, navigation and rear-seat DVD entertainment for \$52,495.

Probably the median Tribeca Limited offers the best combination of style and performance, but Subaru has positioned the vehicle slightly above domestic crossovers like the Ford Edge and GMC Acadia, but below anything from BMW or Lexus.

It will most likely be cross-shopped with the Toyota Highlander, Mazda CX-9, and Honda Pilot. There are good and bad points with each, but Subarus tend to be purchased by more unique clientele, who have a specific set of needs for their new vehicle. Hopefully the small cosmetic changes and big power train changes will entice a few more people to consider the Botox'd and Bowflex'd 2008 Tribeca.

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**MITSUBISHI MOJO Mitsubishi Outlander moves up a size with standard V6 power and available seven seats** You've no doubt seen the commercials featuring the new-for-2007 Mitsubishi Outlander kitted-up in Dakar Rally livery, careening through a muddy construction site before slapping its decals and a pile of mud on the showroom wall.

And, just like the commercial, Mitsubishi hopes chiseled off-road looks will tempt buyers into the taller, longer, and wider second-generation Outlander. While the original version was more tall wagon than sport-ute, ver.2 aims to ape the styling — but not necessarily performance — of Mitsubishi's all-conquering Dakar machines.

The Outlander offers only one engine, and it's not the four-banger of old. The new SOHC 3.0-litre MIVEC V6 offers 220 hp and 204 lb-ft. of torque in either two-wheel or four-wheel-drive. The sole transmission available is a six-speed Sportronic automatic with (quite nice, actually) aluminum steering-wheel-mounted shift paddles.

The engine is smooth, but peak power doesn't arrive until 6,250 rpm, only 250 rpm shy of the redline. Also, the torque figure doesn't max out until 4,000 rpm, meaning you have to wind out the V6 to gain any real acceleration. And compared to its other V6-powered competition — Toyota RAV4, Hyundai Santa Fe — the Outlander comes up short.

For a 1,720 kg vehicle, the Outlander is fairly nimble, featuring MacPherson struts up front with a multi-link arrangement out back; the front and rear feature anti-roll bars as well, although the Mitsu is still a very soft soft-roader.

Our top-of-the-line XLS 4WD tester also featured (cramped) seating for seven; the LS 2WD and 4WD can only carry five. Mind you, the rear-most jump seats had the most obtuse series of instructions to fold flat and set back up. Numbered handles, pulls and straps were completely confusing, and the micro-sized pictograph mounted out of your line of sight only added to the frustration. Better to leave them stowed.

The interior is where Mitsubishi has made the most progress, with much-improved plastics and materials. Think modern Mazda and you're about right; not class leading, but clean and comfortable nonetheless. Also, the XLS gets a 650-watt nine-speaker Rockford Fosgate sound system to blow your eardrums at will.

The most interesting feature was the optional 30GB hard-drive-based Navigation / Entertainment system, which allows you to store a bunch of your own music on the HD itself. However, the question of how to transfer that music is slightly annoying; rather than being able to directly copy music electronically via an input for your MP3 player, the CD drive will 'rip' your songs off CDs, then order them into playlists.

There are RCA inputs on the rear of the center console near the floor, but they're hidden behind a 'video' cover... More obtuse thinking.

The exterior is where the Outlander will win big points. With 18-inch wheels, bright-red paint, squinty headlights and big fenders, the Mitsubishi is on the anime-aggressive side of the spectrum. It'll win favour with the younger generation, much like the new Lancer — think of it as a blank canvas ready for bling.

The real downside to the Outlander's increased size is the decrease in fuel economy. That V6 is relatively thirsty, especially in 4WD guise where it delivers 12.2 L/100 km city and 8.5 L/100 km highway. Also, the price on our tester was a shocking \$36,998, although \$4,000 of that was the Nav/Entertainment unit.

Mitsubishi does offer the longest warranty in Canada at five-years 100,000-km comprehensive, which should help offset some of the pre-purchase nerves.

While the Outlander shows that there's still life in Mitsubishi, it still needs more tweaking before it'll be ready to hit the mall parking lot, let alone the African sand dunes.

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**CHRYSLER'S '08 DETROIT CONCEPTS GO HYBRID** *Can Chrysler recharge its image with these Detroit concepts?* Chrysler has provided an advance preview of its three concept cars for the Detroit show, about seven weeks in advance of the preview days when they'll be formally revealed to the press. But we can understand why they're quick on the trigger; if these concepts are any indication, the automaker, which has long been resistant to change and slow to adopt hybrids, isn't going to make the same mistake with electric vehicles (EVs) and plug-ins (PHEVs).

With each of these, Chrysler aims to pair excitement with environmental friendliness for each of the concepts, which are primarily powered by an electric motor system and advanced, yet-to-be-developed lithium-ion battery pack.

They all appear to achieve this duality, but that's about where the similarities end. Looking at details for each of the particular concepts, they span a wide range in terms of size, design intent - and mechanically, each uses a different approach toward what Chrysler calls a "range extender" for the powertrain.

In the case of the **Chrysler ecoVoyager** concept, that range extender is a small hydrogen fuel cell, allowing a total range of more than 300 miles. The mid-size ecoVoyager is a sleek, rounded one-box design - looking like a low-slung crossover vehicle - that's said to celebrate "the romance of automobile travel embodied in a four-door, four-passenger distinctively American design," with elegance, simplicity, and serenity as priorities. Without the powertrain occupying its traditional place in front, the Chrysler promises to be extremely roomy inside and "really make the most of cab forward once again," according to design chief Trevor Creed. A 200 kW (approximately 250 hp) motor would power the ecoVoyager with enough gusto to reach 60 mph in less than eight seconds.

At only 153 inches long (just a few inches longer than the MINI Cooper) and less than 63 inches wide, the **Jeep Renegade** concept is a little two-seater with a cut-down windshield, prominent roll bar, and an easy-to-clean, hose-out interior, and lightweight aluminum construction - along with, of course, good ground clearance and four-wheel drive. Before even considering that its powertrain yields fuel economy of up to 110 mpg, it seems like the perfect runabout for dune crawling, off-roading, and urban errands. In this case, the propulsion system is electric, and it can go up to 40 miles on electricity only; for longer distances a small-displacement Bluetec diesel kicks in, providing supplemental power for the motor system and charges up the cells. There's also regenerative braking, which in stop-and-go driving especially would help improve efficiency and extend the range.



The **Dodge ZEO** is a four-passenger, 2+2 sport wagon and takes a nearly opposite design direction from the Chrysler, with a long hood, rearward cabin, and monster 23-inch wheels. The ZEO, according to Creed, a "new, responsible breed of muscle car for the 21st Century." And with a larger lithium-ion battery pack to yield a 250-mile driving range, plus a powerful 200 kW electric motor with the juice to rip out zero-to-sixty times of less than six seconds, it would be a pure EV geared for driving enthusiasts.



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### **FLINT: NEXT YEAR—BETTER OR WORSE? A recession in the bag, or brighter days ahead?**

That ugly word "recession" is being heard in the land. On financial TV shows they talk of a coming recession all the time. The columnist Dan Dorfman says it will be worse than recession.

If times are bad, we know the auto business will suffer. In particular our Detroit companies will suffer because they are terribly weak right now. And the new wave of layoffs indicates Detroit is preparing for a storm.

Here's the difference: at Ford, with its 16 percent of the market, a 16.5 million units year means 2,640,000 car and truck sales. At 15.5 million units it's 2,480,000. That may be the difference between selling and approaching a profit, or wild incentives to move the metal.

Are bad times coming, or are we dealing with TV hype, another "end of the world as we know it" story? Earth warming may be old hat, so do they need something else to scare us?

It's true that housing is sick and creditors are losing billions, that new construction is slack, that oil has pushed near \$100 a barrel and we're paying \$3.50 for 93-octane gas in the East, and \$4 a gallon doesn't seem that far away. But as I write this the stock market is up for the day, oil is down to about \$91 a barrel, and unemployment and all the other economic indicators seem fine.

More important to me, the best stock market predictor I know, Bob Brinker (maybe you hear him on the radio on weekends) says he sees no evidence that a recession will come despite all the scare talk by the media. Bob may be wrong, of course, but had I followed his advice for the past decade I would be filthy rich today.

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**STI SAMPLE *First drive reveals softer Subie performance variant*** One day after the world debut of the 2008 Impreza WRX STI at the Tokyo motor show ("Green Is for Grass," AW, Nov. 12), Subaru provided an opportunity to sample the all-new car on Fuji Speedway.

Though our exposure was limited to right-hand-drive, 2.0-liter, 295-hp Japanese-domestic-market cars (a U.S.-spec drive is imminent), it's safe to say that the new car is far more civilized than its thunderous predecessor.

At speed, the ride is quiet, but comfort comes at a price: The first turn revealed body roll we never would have expected from the performance flagship. Engine power remains fierce, with the turbo H4 revving smoothly to the 8000-rpm redline. Steering is nicely weighted and responsive, and the Brembo brakes are as impressive as the acceleration.

Adding ride comfort is Subaru's ploy to expand the STI's market--the same strategy Mitsubishi is employing with its all-new Evolution ("Giant Leap Forward," AW, Oct. 1). However, performance is still the priority, and Subaru is adamant that the new model one-ups its predecessor with a new multimode center differential and dynamic control technologies.

It took a few laps around Fuji before we found ourselves nodding in agreement, noticing a touch more grip as the aforementioned systems came into play. The adjustable center differential has three preset modes and a six-option manual mode to control the level of rear bias, with the most severe setting sending 70 percent of power to the back. Dynamic controls have three settings, including a mode that sustains power even when intentionally drifting the car. Together, the systems provide a high level of

control no matter how hard the car is driven.

The STI hits U.S. showrooms in January with a 2.5-liter turbocharged boxer with a slight power advantage. The Recaro seats we enjoyed in Japan won't be offered stateside--they're incompatible with required U.S. airbag sensors. Look for complete details and driving impressions of the U.S. model in an upcoming issue.

**SPECS**

**ON SALE:** Now (Japan), January 2008 (United States)

**BASE PRICE:** \$34,900

**DRIVETRAIN:** 295-hp, 299-lb-ft, 2.0-liter turbocharged H4; awd, six-speed manual

**CURB WEIGHT:** 3263 lb

**0-60 MPH:** 4.9 sec (mfr) **FUEL ECONOMY (JAPAN):** 25 mpg