toyota 86 gt v subaru brz

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FOR THOSE ASPIRING to own an affordable, driver-focused sporty car, the Toyota 86 and Subaru BRZ represent the most anticipated new vehicle launch in many a year.

A joint project between the two Japanese manufacturers, the pair shares a purpose-built, rear-wheel-drive platform utilising a more compact version of Subaru’s Impreza four-cylinder engine, enhanced with Toyota’s well-regarded D-4S direct-injection (to improve torque and fuel economy).

The front suspension is based on Subaru’s WRX STi, with the struts shortened and A-arms reversed to accommodate the 2.0-litre boxer engine, which is set low and rearwards as possible to help make for a 53/47 front/rear weight distribution and centre of gravity a bare 460 mm off the ground.

A six-speed manual and optional six-speed auto are available in each of two 86 (GT’s and base model GT) and single BRZ specification levels. The auto costs $2500 in the Toyota and $2580 in the Subaru.

So, there is much in common with few points of difference. Basically, the Subaru has stiffer front springs (by 10 percent) and different front exterior packaging.

The BRZ and GTS boast a bigger brake and wheel package (294 mm front/290 mm rear ventilated discs) and 17” alloys sporting Michelin tyres. This compares with the GT’s 277 mm ventilated fronts and 286 mm solid rear discs and 16” alloys shod with narrower 55-aspect Yokohama rubber.

Steering is Subaru rack and pinion with quick 13.0:1 ratio Toyota electric power-assistance.

In the front is a pair of supportive sports seats, while a versatile, single-piece seat in the back can accommodate two occupants up to 170 cm tall or be folded flat to create more boot space.

All BRZs and 86s roll off the Subaru production line at Gunma in Japan.

Value for Money

The good news starts with the GT, which, at a scarcely-believable $29,990 for the manual, is far from a ‘poverty pack’ (see separate panel).

The GTS is also excellent value. Priced from a sharp $35,490, it gains auto-leveling HID headlamps, satellite navigation with live traffic updates, dual-zone climate-control airconditioning, leather accenting and aluminium pedals.

The BRZ, at $37,150, is similarly well equipped (see separate panel), the major exception being the satellite navigation and leather/Alcantara-trimmed and heated front seats are $1815 and $1500 options respectively.

Both vehicles score well on servicing; Toyota charges $170 for the first four scheduled services under its capped price plan, while Subaru offers four free services to 60,000 km. Insurance premiums are line ball at just under $1000 per annum.

On the Road

Around town, both impress as capable and easy-to-live-with everyday transport, though the GT with its smaller wheels and narrower rubber offers a more cossetting ride.

But taking the long way home, via the twisty bits, is the box that the 86 and BRZ most emphatically tick. These are
cars that provide absolute connection between driver and road.

The most singular quality of a virtuous personality is the BRZ’s confidence-inspiring poise and balance when shown a series of testing bends and corners, a trait mirrored by the GTS, which we drove a week later. The grip threshold and traction is higher in each than the GT, not surprising given their Torsen limited-slip differential (which the latter as an auto lacks) and bigger footprint.

The GT also exudes a little body roll, something nearly indiscernible in the other two, when worked hard. But in some ways, this and its lesser grip and traction only serve to make the GT more exploitable and enjoyable.

Each has superbly-weighted steering that would leave far more expensive sports cars in the shade, being highly responsive on-centre and nearly telepathic on turn in.

And that firmness in ride quality felt in the BRZ (and GTS) around town morphs into composure and absorbency at higher speeds over our typical back roads, when tough questions are asked of the damping and rebound.

Though not particularly powerful or torquey, the normally-aspirated powerplant is in its element when asked to sing for its supper. At about 3500 rpm, the torque flattens then produces its best from around 4300-5000 rpm.

The GT auto edged out the BRZ manual in our acceleration tests, being one or two-tenths of a second quicker from 0-60, 0-80 and over the standing 400 m. Interestingly, the biggest margin was 0.5 sec in both the sprint from 0-100 km (a reversal of their manufacturers’ respective claimed times of 8.2 and 7.6 seconds) and in roll-on acceleration from 60-100 km/h.

In any case, the times overall could be seen as an endorsement of how well matched the engine and auto (with self-shifter) are. Downshifts even come complete with throttle blip! But, in terms of driving enjoyment, we would go for the slick-shifting manual.

Initially, the brake pedal in each seems a little wooden, lacking feel and retardation, but this soon converts to a sense of reassuring durability and competence. Asked to pull up from 80 km/h in a series of emergency braking, the 86 stopped in an average of 22.7 metres to the BRZ’s 24.1 m.

Testing driving conditions blew out the pair’s ADR fuel combined averages of 7.1 litres/100 km (GT auto) and 7.8 (BRZ manual) a little, with the former returning 9.7 and the latter 9.5.

**Conclusion**

So, which to buy? Based on our twin test, we would take the Subaru. It’s the more rounded and, we think, potentially the more satisfying to own in the long term. But, as our time in the very similar GTS proved, there’s little between these two upper specification versions.

Exclusivity though, favours the Subaru, which come individually numbered (on the console) and at a reported ratio of one BRZ to four 86s.

That said, at $29,990 for the manual, the GT shapes as the sporty car buy of the 21st century. ‘Bang for buck’ doesn’t come any better.

Either way, getting your hands on any of this trio is not going to be easy. There’s up to an 18 month waiting list for the GTS, while the first batch of BRZ sold out online in a matter of hours.

The wait, though, would be well worth every second.

**BRZ STATS**

MLP: $37,150 (manual) *

WARRANTY: 3 years/unlimited km.

SAFETY: Dual front/side/curtain/ driver knee airbags, anti-lock brakes, electronic brakeforce distribution, brake assist, electronic stability control, traction control.

KEY FEATURES: 17” alloys, limited slip differential, self-leveling Bi-Xenon headlights, power folding door mirrors, dual-zone climate control air-conditioning, CD player with MP3/WMA/iPod compatibility, multi-info display, cruise control, Bluetooth, smart key, height/reach steering, DataDot security system, immobiliser.

ENGINE: 2.0-litre, 16-valve DOHC, Boxer 4-cyl.

MAX. POWER: 147 kW@7000 rpm.

MAX. TORQUE: 205 Nm@6600 rpm.

CRASH RATING: ★★★★★

EMISSIONS RATING: ★★★★

FOR: Price, sporty drive, equipment.

AGAINST: Rear three-quarter visibility.

**86 GT STATS**

MLP: $32,490 (auto) *

WARRANTY: 3 years/100,000 km.

SAFETY: As above.

KEY FEATURES: 16” alloys, cruise control, air-conditioning, multi-info display, tilt/reach steering, CD tuner with Bluetooth, voice recognition and AUX and USB inputs, power windows, halogen headlamps, power-folding mirrors.

ENGINE: As above.

MAX. POWER: As above.

MAX. TORQUE: As above.

CRASH RATING: N/A.

EMISSIONS RATING: ★★★★

FOR: Price, sporty drive.

AGAINST: Rear three-quarter visibility, lacks digital speedo.

* THE BRZ IS AVAILABLE ONLINE ONLY AT A NATIONAL DRIVEAWAY PRICE (NDP). THE 86 GT’S PRICE IS THE MANUFACTURER’S LIST PRICE (MLP).