WHICH IS THE BETTER BUY? THE LATEST EDITION OF TOYOTA’S TOP-SELLING RAV4, OR SUBARU’S AWARD-WINNING OUTBACK? WE PUT THEM TO THE TEST.

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IMAGES AUTONEWS
TOYOTA'S RAV4 CAPPED off a third consecutive record year in 2015 by becoming the first vehicle in its class to pass 250,000 sales nationally, making it Australia's top-selling SUV.

Subaru's Outback 2.5i Premium is, of course, our reigning Australia's Best All-Wheel-Drive SUV Under $50,000.

Given their market relevance and both makers releasing 2016 upgrades, a match-up proved irresistible.

VALUE FOR MONEY
Being top and top-but-one of their respective ranges, take it as a given that the RAV4 all-wheel-drive turbo-diesel Cruiser and Outback 2.0D (turbo-diesel) Premium both come comprehensively equipped.

For 2016, the CVT-equipped 2.0D Premium gains Subaru’s third generation EyeSight technology, which includes autonomous emergency braking with pedestrian recognition along with adaptive cruise control, collision detection and lane departure warning.

Tick the boxes also for a Vision Assist package (blind spot monitoring, lane change assist, auto dim rear view mirror, high beam assist, and rear cross traffic alert) and three-year map update guarantee for its satellite navigation. The price has increased by $1500 to $44,990.

Like the Outback, prices for the RAV4 turbo-diesel variants have also risen by between $1000 and $2000, taking the AWD Cruiser to $49,490.

RAV4’s new safety technologies include pre-collision system with forward collision warning and automatic emergency brake, automatic high beam and dynamic radar cruise control. Tick the boxes also for active cruise control and blind spot monitor with rear cross traffic alert, lane departure alert, and front parking sensors.

The projected cost of ownership is close. Both have three year/unlimited kilometre warranties and similar Glass’s Guide residuals after five years/70,000km of 42 percent (Outback) and 43 percent (RAV4). Ditto annual insurance premiums, where the Subaru at $836.03 just shades $852.75 for the Toyota.

Capped price servicing favours the Toyota at $180 per six month/10,000km service compared with an average of $407.30 per six month/12,500km service for the Subaru.

DESIGN AND FUNCTION
Externally, there is little difference in height and width. Restyled front and rear bumpers add 35mm to the RAV4’s overall length, although the Subaru remains 210mm longer. Internally, Toyota’s 577 litres of cargo space (with seats in place) is 65 litres more.

Commonality includes dual-zone climate control, satellite navigation, comprehensive connectivity, leather interior, reversing camera, sunroof, and powered driver’s seat and tailgate door.

However, the Subaru boasts a few extras such as a powered seat for the front passenger, airconditioning vents for the rear passengers, rear seats with auto fold and recline function, and a full-size spare wheel.

Both cars have a five-star ANCAP safety rating.

ON THE ROAD
On paper, our test pair shapes up remarkably close in performance specification. Both produce their peak power of 110kW@ 3600rpm, while the Subaru’s peak torque of 350Nm is just 10Nm greater than the Toyota’s.

However, the Subaru’s 2.0-litre Boxer engine torque curve is lower and broader, kicking in at 1600rpm as opposed to 2000rpm for the Toyota’s 2.2-litre inline unit. That makes for better driveability, though the RAV4 feels more willing, especially on light throttle application.
The Outback can claim towing honours, with a maximum braked figure of 1700kg to 1200kg.

The transmissions are a point of difference, the Toyota using a six-speed auto and the Subaru a CVT with paddle-shift and shift lock. Both do the job smoothly and precisely.

Each car rides on 18-inch alloys and carries its weight without complaint (Subaru 1723kg, Toyota 1635kg) and feels – for a mid-sized SUV – light on its feet.

The new RAV4’s upgrade includes a more rigid rear body shell and revised shock absorbers and coil springs. The result is improved ride comfort and driver involvement. Dynamically, the Outback is a step above, handling, steering and riding more like a slightly-raised station wagon than high-stepping SUV.

Ditto NVH (noise, vibration and harshness), Toyota has improved the insulation coverage and thickness to reduce road, tyre and exhaust noise, but the Subaru is noticeably quieter on all counts.

Our 450km-round drive south-west of Brisbane – over Mt Glorious to Boonah and the Main Range National Park near Killarney – took in a four-wheel-driver’s favourite, the Condamine River Road. Both cars handled the 20km of dirt and gravel and 14 river crossings with ease, an endorsement of their recreational off-road capability.

On test, each returned a commendable average fuel consumption figure 1.5 litres/100km outside its ADR combined cycle of 6.3 litres (Subaru) and 6.7 (Toyota).

The Outback is the winner here. It is $4500 cheaper and an overall better drive. That said, with more than 250,000 sales, the RAV4 must be doing something right. As that old saying goes, “nothing succeeds like success”.

CONCLUSION

The Outback’s cargo capacity is 512 litres.

The RAV4’s cargo capacity is 577 litres.

The Toyota engine is a 2.2-litre inline unit.

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FAST FACTS

SUBARU OUTBACK 2.0D PREMIUM
- SAFETY: ESC, ABS, 7 airbags, reversing camera, EyeSight driver assist.
- CONNECTIVITY: Bluetooth, MP3, WMA, AUX, CD, voice command compatible six-speaker audio touchscreen system, streaming audio, 6 speaker Hi-Fi.
- WEIGHT (KERB MASS): 1723kg.
- TYRES: 225/60 R18.
- TOWING (BRAKED): 1700kg.
- WARRANTY: 3yr/unlimited km.

FAST FACTS

TOYOTA RAV4 CRUISER AWD
- SAFETY: ESC, ABS, 6 airbags, reversing camera, pre-collision system.
- CONNECTIVITY: Bluetooth, MP3, WMA, AUX, CD, 4.2-inch colour multi-information display.
- WEIGHT (KERB MASS): 1635kg.
- TOWING (BRAKED): 1200kg.
- WARRANTY: 3yr/100,000 km.