

DRIVING PASSION

Medium-size solutions

A challenge from Subaru

Despite offering a happy medium between large and small cars, the mid-sized segment has suffered more in 2009's sales decline. It seems buyers are heading further downmarket for their economy motoring fix. Maybe the new Subaru Liberty will help rekindle interest.

The fifth generation of the stalwart nameplate was launched in September, boasting dramatically improved economy and much-increased rear-seating space.

Efficiency gains are provided by a package of new drive train features, most notably a continuously variable transmission (CVT) that mates to the big-selling 2.5-litre four-cylinder "boxer" engine. The space

issue is resolved by stretching the wheelbase 80mm and the width by 50mm. These important changes aid the new Liberty's contest against the latest Mazda6 and Honda Accord Euro, both launched last year and regarded as the best cars in the segment.

But it's not only facts and figures that the Liberty needs to match up on, as the 6 and Euro also add some emotion and passion to the mix, thanks to powerful styling and an enjoyable driving experience. Our brief first impressions indicate Liberty is competitive with them on-road. But you can be the judge when it comes to styling, with the rider that the Liberty looks better in real life than photos. **BRUCE NEWTON**



**\$33,990-
\$51,990**

Subaru Liberty

A fuel consumption improvement of up to 11% is impressive considering the range retains all-wheel drive and grows in weight, both adding to thirst.

Pros: Improved economy, space, wide choice of engines, sedan and wagon body-styles, five-star crash rating, knee airbag added.

Cons: Styling takes some getting used to. www.subaru.com.au

**\$29,100-
\$44,840**

Mazda6

Elegantly styled 6 comes with petrol and diesel four-cylinder engine choices, and in sedan, hatch and wagon body styles.

Pros: Very communicative to drive, looks, space, safety including five-star ANCAP rating.

Cons: Nobbly ride, some noise intrusion, diesel only has manual transmission. www.mazda.com.au

**\$34,290-
\$48,290**

Honda Accord Euro

The reigning *Wheels* Car of the Year has just one sedan-only four-cylinder petrol engine choice.

Pros: Revvy and responsive gem, comforting ride, handles well, bold sedan styling, five-star crash rating.

Cons: Still tight in rear seat despite improved space, remote steering is dynamic weakpoint. www.honda.com.au

STAFF PICK

"The compost corkscrew has transformed the soggy mess at the bottom of my compost bin, aerating and speeding up the composting process. Compost Mate sells for \$19.95." **Susan Hely**

WHAT YOU CAN GET ...

A bunch of flowers

Keep loved ones happy

Giving flowers is a great way to get out of "the doghouse". But keeping your loved ones happy can be hazardous to your pocket. Here's what you can expect to pay for a bunch of lilies this month.

CHEAP: GROW YOUR OWN

Lilies are a cheap and easy option for the novice gardener. All you need is a garden, bulbs and some compost. Pick up a bag of four

bulbs at your local garden centre for about \$6.50. Prepare soil in summer and mix in fertiliser. Use manure or your own compost – it's free. Plant bulbs about 10cm deep, top up soil and bury. Water regularly – bulbs should be up in about 10 days.

TOTAL: 4x Asiatic Lilly bulbs \$6.50 av, manure \$0

STANDARD: SUPERMARKET/

PETROL STATION/FARMERS' MARKET

A bunch costs about \$25 at a florist including boutique packaging and ribbons. Try a supermarket or petrol station instead. A bunch at Woolworths costs \$10. Try farmers' markets for fresh, often cheaper produce. Be wary of roadside specials that tend to mark up.

TOTAL: Bunch of lilies: \$10 av.

DELUXE: SPECIAL DELIVERY

Prices vary from about \$35 for a single red rose to more than a hundred with champagne and chocolates. \$179 gets you 10 lilies plus Chandon sparkling wine and 60g Lindt chocolates at Roses Only (www.rosesonly.com.au). Delivery charges depend on location.

TOTAL: \$50/\$300+, plus delivery. **RICHARD SCOTT**