



**Never faster, never better; roof air-vent lies flush on leading edge and is cranked open when cabin ventilation is needed**

## C IS CRACKING AND COMPLETE

**SUBARU IMPREZA STi SPEC C**

**PRICE £27,495**

**ON SALE Now**

AND JUST WHEN you thought it was black arm-band time. Just when you thought the game was up. Just as Mitsubishi is putting its Evo lineage in mothballs and the very future of the homologation rally special looks in doubt, Subaru gives us this.

Called STi Spec C, it is nothing more than a throw-the-lot-at-it special designed to shut the traps of anyone insolent enough (yours truly) to assume that the appeal of this type of car is diminishing rapidly. Which surely means that the Spec C is just a Japan-market STi, right, with a few tuning goodies bolted on and a name drafted in from *Gran Turismo*?

Strictly speaking, yes, it is. But instead of merely a few add-ons, it benefits from pretty much every aftermarket toy that Subaru Technica International can find. And the list of toys available is roughly the size of South London's *Yellow Pages*, leading one to assume that the finished product is somewhat special.

Even forearmed with such knowledge, I always approach these things with caution. Even my geekish ability to remember every different spec of Subaru I've driven is beginning to fail me, and the dank surroundings of a Cheltenham Industrial Estate don't help. But the car does. Sitting outside in solid white (I've always loved the honesty of white homologators) it cuts a completely different shape on the road. More attractive the 2003 Scooby face may be, but in standard STi spec its stance isn't especially thrusting, and that rear wing is totally over-cooked. Spec C sits 10mm lower, juts its chin a little further forward and its midriff is a mite lower. And it replaces that nasty wing with a spindly carbonfibre thing that couldn't look better if it tried, and one of those manual air-vents in the roof. In my experience, only the most serious Scoobys have a roof vent.

And then there's 322bhp at 6500rpm and 325lb ft at 3750rpm, straight out of



**Centre binnacle and red back-lit dials unique to Spec C; flat-four smoother than ever; bespoke Bridgestones standard; 0-62mph in 4.2sec**



Alloy bonnet helps to save weight



Spec C gets 322bhp and 325lb ft; rear wing now made of carbonfibre

the box, and a very restrictive exhaust. That's certainly poke aplenty, but factor in a 1300kg kerb weight, and you've got yourself a ground-attack missile. But, hang on, how the hell has Subaru carved 170kg out of it? Thin glass, lightweight door panels, roof panel, alloy wheels and bonnet for starters. No air-con, a pair of DIY windows and no sound deadening for seconds. This is looking like a very trick tool.

It gets better: the engine is radically different. A twin-scroll, big-bearing turbo spins harder, requires less energy and spools earlier than the standard car's. Enlarged induction pipes and a different spec inlet cam working at the commands of a pukka motor sport ECU are now so efficient that the STi exhaust, relatively speaking, has become hopelessly restrictive. Up the pipe diameter and 350bhp can be yours immediately.

We're going to run out of space soon, so I'll stop there. For the full list, dial up [www.litchfieldimports.co.uk/subaru/sti/japspec.html](http://www.litchfieldimports.co.uk/subaru/sti/japspec.html) and digest the most impressively uprated sports car since someone at Porsche decided he fancied the idea of a lightweight 2.7-litre 911 and would name it RS. This is Subaru's RS.

Assessing it away from a circuit is, however, mighty difficult because it is a 110 per cent track weapon. With one very odd concession to everyday refinement: it has the smoothest Subaru flat-four I've ever driven. Equal length manifolds are standard on this car, as they are on all Japanese-spec STis, and the difference is amazing.

The rest is raw aggression: very little ride comfort, intrusive road noise and enough body control to handle any B-road at 290mph. Probably. But the public highway does reveal the one thing you need to know above all else: that the Spec C drives like a Mitsubishi Evo VII. It steers with the same alacrity, loves direction changes and hates understeer.

Even with the restrictive pipes, it's a manically fast car. It pulls hard from 3500rpm to around 6800rpm and then gets a little breathless for the final limiter-

bound hit. UK-spec Prodrive STis will always be shrinking images in the rear-view mirror, though.

It's at this point that I normally have to bite my tongue and tell you that the £36,000 you need to buy one is fine value when you consider the bits on offer, blah, blah, blah. And you'd rightly throw the mag in the bin at the notion of blowing nearly £40k on an Impreza. However, all this can be yours for just £27,495. On the road, ECU mapped for optimum performance on 95 unleaded, with a year's warranty and Cat 1 alarm all included. Tell me you're not tempted.

As an occasional road car/track car it makes perfect sense. For a young track day fan without the funds for two cars, it would be the perfect vehicle. On tech-value alone, this is the most fascinating Scooby ever. Did I mention the bespoke Bridgestone RE 070 Cup tyres, the new front sub-frame and solid suspension drop links that actually lengthen the wheelbase, or the bigger anti-roll bars? Check out the website, try the car. Like me, you'll be convinced that there's still life in the old homologator.

**Chris Harris**

**Factfile**

<b>How fast?</b>	
<b>0-62mph</b>	4.2sec (est)
<b>Top speed</b>	150mph (est)
<b>How thirsty?</b>	
<b>Combined</b>	na
<b>CO<sub>2</sub> emissions</b>	na
<b>How big?</b>	
<b>Weight</b>	1300kg
<b>Engine</b>	
<b>Layout</b>	4cyls opposed, 1994cc, turbo
<b>Max power</b>	322bhp at 6500rpm
<b>Max torque</b>	325lb ft at 3750rpm
All figures are manufacturer's claims	

**THE AUTOCAR VERDICT**

The tonic that every jaded Subaru Impreza fan has been hoping for. It's an uncompromised blinder that has it all



0-62mph now posted in 4.9sec; feels more flexible than standard VIII

**BETTER VIII THAN EVER**

**MITSUBISHI EVO VIII FQ-300**

**PRICE £28,995**

**ON SALE Now**

SO YOU'VE READ last week's road test of the Mitsubishi Evo VIII and have decided that the time has come for a word with the bank manager. But something is not quite right - and that something wears a pink STi badge, is made by Subaru and produces 300bhp. It might have only 24bhp more than the Evo VIII, but 'three hundred brake' sounds vastly more impressive.

So if you're committed enough, you'll do just what Mitsubishi predicts that 90 per cent of Evo buyers will do, and shell out another two grand for the FQ-300 model. Naturally the '300' represents the bhp produced (it's 301, to be exact) and the upgrade is to the engine alone; the hugely capable chassis is left well alone.

Interestingly, the extra power is extracted solely through mechanical mods, rather than by re-mapping the ECU, therefore leaving more scope for effective tuning. On the intake side, a Superflow foam air filter is fitted, replacing the paper item from the VIII, and the FQ gets larger-bore intercooler pipes. As for the exhaust: larger down-pipes are used, improving turbo response, and a larger diameter system reduces back pressure. The net result is that maximum power is produced at 6200rpm, 300rpm lower than on the standard VIII, and torque rises from 289lb ft at 3500rpm to 300lb ft at 4500rpm.

Of course, it feels faster (the 0-62mph drops from 5.3 to 4.9sec), but the beauty of the FQ is that its performance is more accessible. Yes, there's still a push in your back as the turbo finds its feet at around 3000rpm, but its mid-range urge has improved noticeably; gearchanges are fewer and throttle applications can be gentler to achieve identical speeds to the standard VIII. The FQ simply feels bigger-hearted and more flexible. But, perhaps

more important, if the standard Evo can lick the STi point-to-point (as our recent twin test concluded) then the FQ should rub salt in the Scooby's wounds. And that, to some, will make the extra £2000 money well spent.

**Simon Hucknall**



Fewer gearchanges required now



Power up to 301bhp at 6200rpm

**Factfile**

<b>How fast?</b>	
<b>0-62mph</b>	4.9sec
<b>Top speed</b>	157mph
<b>How thirsty?</b>	
<b>Combined</b>	20.4mpg
<b>CO<sub>2</sub> emissions</b>	334g/km
<b>How big?</b>	
<b>Weight</b>	1410kg
<b>Engine</b>	
<b>Layout</b>	4 cyls, transverse, 1997cc, turbo
<b>Max power</b>	301bhp at 6200rpm
<b>Max torque</b>	300lb ft at 4500rpm
All figures are manufacturer's claims	

**THE AUTOCAR VERDICT**

An extra two-grand buys a more user-friendly, as well as a faster Evo VIII. Well worth the premium over the standard car