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2006 SUBARU B9 TRIBECA

It has great, er... personality

0:10 Don't guffaw, but Subaru thinks it can build a better X5. Really. Your eyes are rolling, but the engineers of this Indiana-built crossover were so sure we'd agree that they let us drive the new B9 Tribeca back-to-back with an X5 3.0i priced about \$15,000 higher.

Subaru's six cylinders are arranged horizontally for a lower center of gravity. This 3.0-liter flat-six comes directly out of an Outback and sounds even sweeter than the X5's inline-six. Relative to that sterling mill, it produces an extra 25 horsepower and five-pound-feet of torque. Weighing in at a claimed 4250 pounds, the Scooby's six has 450 fewer pounds to lug around than the Bimmer, giving it a 19 percent advantage in weight-to-power.

Drop the hammer, and the B9 steps off briskly enough to discount Subaru's 8.0-second 0-to-60-mph estimate as at least a half-second conservative. Short gearing in the standard five-speed automatic and an aggressive throttle tip-in would make this a difficult vehicle to place accurately on rocks and other off-road obstacles. But with no low-range or locking differentials, Subaru (like BMW) is content to cede that type of driving to Jeep. Standard



AWD and stability control teamed with 8.4 inches of ground clearance should tackle any rough two-track.

A front strut/rear multilink suspension was tuned to closely match the handling dynamics of the BMW, while softening the suspension settings for improved ride quality. Fat 255/55R18 Goodyear Eagles match the size of the X5's sport suspension tires. An hour behind the wheel afforded few twisty sections, but each was threaded with aplomb and minimal body roll. Midcourse steering corrections never were required, but the steering feels a trifle light, and it transmits less road-surface information than

a BMW's does. Still, this is an impressively astute road-runner.

Where Subaru clearly trumps BMW is in interior-space efficiency. Stretching just five inches longer on a 2.8-inch-shorter wheelbase the B9 Tribeca fits three rows of seats (a third-row-delete option will be offered). The middle row slides to apportion legroom between rows. Max cargo space with the seats folded flat appears to be much larger than in the BMW.

Subaru's new aeronautical, dare we say Alfa-inspired, façade may cause passersby to smirk, but the smiles on a B9 driver's face will be genuine. —Frank Markis

» 2006 Subaru B9 Tribeca

Base price (est)	\$32,000
Vehicle layout	Front engine, AWD, 4-door, 5-7-pass wagon
Engine type	F-6, aluminum block/head, DOHC, 4 valves/cyl
Displacement, ci/cc	183.0 / 2999
Max horsepower SAE net	250 @ 6600 rpm
Max torque SAE net, lb-ft	219 @ 4200 rpm
Transmission	5-speed automatic
Curb weight, lb (est)	4250
0-60 mph, sec (est)	8.0
EPA mpg, city/hwy	Not yet rated
On sale in U.S.	June 2005