



THE HISTORY OF RALLY IMPREZA

1993 - Subaru Impreza 555

The production Impreza was launched in 1993, quickly followed by a Prodrive-designed rally version, the Impreza 555. Mechanically the Impreza and the Legacy that the team had previously competed with were very similar. The Impreza retained the Legacy's compact, lightweight engine, a well-balanced chassis and strut-type suspension all round but it was smaller and more manoeuvrable. The new turbo, intercooler and cylinder heads gave it 15-20 more horsepower and Prodrive was keen to put its new creation to work on the most demanding test bed in the world - the World Rally Championship.

The Impreza 555 made its World Championship debut on Finland's 1000 Lakes Rally in 1993 where two cars were entered, driven by Markku Alen and Ari Vatanen. Vatanen dominated the event, and gave a thrilling demonstration of the car's potential. A windscreen de-misting problem ultimately denied the team a maiden victory, but Ari's second place singled the car out as one to watch.

1994 - Subaru Impreza 555

Colin McRae remained with the Subaru team in 1994 and was joined by double world champion Carlos Sainz. In an excellent start to the season, Carlos finished 3rd on the Monte Carlo Rally. Following a 2nd place on the tarmac Tour de Corse event, the Impreza 555 scored its first WRC victory on the next round when Carlos Sainz won the Acropolis Rally. From that point Subaru began a remarkable period of success.

Possum Bourne won the FIA Asia Pacific Championship, while Sainz's team-mate Colin McRae claimed two further victories for the Subaru World Rally Team on the New Zealand Rally and the RAC Rally of Great Britain.

At the close of the 1994 season, the Subaru World Rally Team had finished second in the Manufacturers' Championship with Carlos Sainz also second in the Driver's Championship.

1995 - Subaru Impreza 555

The 1995 season began with a change to the regulations. To restrain vehicle power the diameter of the turbo's air restrictor was reduced from 38 to 36mm. To counteract the drastic reduction in performance, the Subaru engine received a new cam shaft design and compression ratios. The modifications worked, with victory for Carlos Sainz on the season opener in Monte Carlo.

Carlos, Colin McRae and the Impreza 555 swept the board in 1995, winning four events on their way to both the Manufacturers' and Drivers' World

Championship titles. Colin McRae became the youngest ever World Champion while his team-mate Sainz took second place. If the titles were not enough, the team had taken 1-2-3 victories on both the slippery mud of the Rally GB and the dry asphalt of Catalunya.

1996 - Subaru Impreza 555

As defending champions, the 1996 season began slowly for the Subaru World Rally Team as it failed to get the results it wanted from the outset. The first victory of the year came on the Acropolis Rally of Greece, four events into the championship.

Further wins remained elusive until the end of the season, when reigning champion Colin McRae took firsts on Rallye Sanremo and Rallye Catalunya. Although his title went to Mitsubishi's Tommi Mäkinen that year, his victories and the podium positions of his team mates Kenneth Eriksson and Piero Liatti ensured that the Subaru World Rally Team kept their Manufacturers' crown for the second year running.

1997 - Subaru Impreza WRC97

From 1997 there was a new look to the specifications of cars competing in the World Rally Championship. A new breed of cars was created to the new 'WRC' specification. Revised regulations permitted major changes, chiefly to the width of the car and suspension geometry, to engine internals and to aerodynamics. It was a concept that has subsequently had a profound effect on the sport and directly led to the current glut of top manufacturers contesting the championship.

Although based heavily on the basic concept of the Group A Impreza, the WRC97 version set the visual standard by which other manufacturers were judged. While Prodrive engineers capitalised on the freedoms allowed by the new technical regulations, renowned auto-stylist Peter Stevens was drafted in to get the most from the aerodynamic opportunities. The Impreza WRC97 was the first WRC car to be unveiled and widely acclaimed as the most visually stunning.

1998 - Subaru Impreza WRC98

The development of the car continued through the late 1990s, with the WRC98 further refining the Impreza package and incorporating the latest technological advances.

The team entered the 1998 WRC season looking for a fourth consecutive Manufacturers' Title, but it was not to be. The first round of the year in Monte Carlo got off to a fairly good start, with Colin McRae finishing third and Piero Liatti fourth.

Colin then went on to win three events in Portugal, Corsica and Greece, where a fourth consecutive WRC title looked assured. However rain on Rally New Zealand and Rally Finland, a puncture on Rallye Sanremo, and a turbo problem in Australia signalled the end of the team's title hopes. The second half of the season closed without a single win for Subaru. The team finished

third in the Manufacturers' Championship, with Colin and Piero third and seventh in the Drivers' Championship respectively.

1999 - Subaru Impreza WRC99

Among the array of high technology in the Subaru Impreza range was the unique semi-automatic gearbox together with a fly by wire throttle, as fitted to the 1999 specification Impreza WRC. Physical selection of the gears was made by a series of hydraulic actuators, controlled by a computer. Unlike previous versions of the Subaru system, there was no gear lever in the car. Now the driver pushed or pulled a paddle to the right of the steering wheel to make selections. With an electronically controlled throttle, the driver didn't even need to take his foot off the accelerator when changing a gear as the car's computer systems automatically reduced the engine speed momentarily to enable the next gear to be selected. All modern rally cars now have this technology but Prodrive and Subaru are proud to have been the innovators.

After a comparatively disappointing 1998 season, by the Subaru World Rally Team's exceptionally high standards, and a difficult first half of 1999 where the team's efforts were dogged by mechanical problems, a dramatic victory in Argentina in 1999 signalled a return to form. In the second half of the season the Impreza, now driven by Britain's Richard Burns and four time world champion Juha Kankkunen was once again the car to beat. Following the win in Argentina, the Impreza claimed victories in Greece, Finland, Australia and GB. Richard ended the season as runner-up in the championship.

2000 - Subaru Impreza WRC2000

The outgoing Subaru Impreza WRC99 was the result of a 10 years evolution process that began with the Legacy. The WRC2000 was a complete redesign of the rally car following a 10-month development project that started with a clean sheet of paper. Every component on the rally car was examined for possible improvement and although the end product looked similar in external appearance to the WRC99, underneath that familiar skin around 80 percent of the car was new.

In one of the most eagerly anticipated debuts the sport has seen, the WRC2000 made its appearance in Portugal, and with a dominant Richard Burns behind the wheel it claimed victory straight out of the box. More successes followed for the WRC2000, a nail-biting second place on the tarmac of Catalunya and another victory, this time in the mud and rocks of Argentina. Despite another home win on the Rally GB and his most successful World Rally season to date, Burns again had to settle for the runner-up spot in the World Championship. His team-mate, Juha Kankkunen finished eighth in the Drivers' standings.

2001 - Subaru Impreza WRC2001

If the one area of the Impreza WRC2000 that wasn't obviously different to the previous incarnations of the model was the bodyshell, the same could not be said of the WRC2001.

Development of the new car was in two phases. The first was the mechanical development that had been tested and honed in the WRC2000 before being transferred to the new WRC2001 bodyshell. The second was to address the physical considerations of aerodynamics, bodyshell strength, packaging and weight distribution. Once again, Prodrive's director of styling, Peter Stevens, oversaw the external elements of the car - a project that began as early as September 1999.

Joining Richard in 2001 were three more drivers. Norway's first WRC driver Petter Solberg, Estonian Markko Martin and 2000 FIA Team's Cup winner Toshi Arai. A difficult start to the season was quickly overturned by Subaru's dedicated team of engineers. Thanks to a determined approach by lead driver Burns, the latest evolution of the Impreza range tasted the ultimate success on the final round. Victory in New Zealand threw Burns right into the heart of a title battle that would go all the way to the wire in the closest finale in the sport's history. When his closest rivals faltered, a controlled third place on Rally GB was enough to secure Burns' first World Drivers' Championship and the fifth title for Subaru.

2002 - Subaru Impreza WRC2002

The 2002 season saw fresh challenges. Four-time World Champion Tommi Mäkinen led the 555 Subaru World Rally Team line up and the Subaru Impreza WRC2002 was introduced on the Tour de Corse, the third round of the season.

Minor external changes were made to the car during the season while under the bonnet internal development were introduced on each event. The exhaust manifold, flywheel and turbo-chargers were altered, while the drive shaft, front housing, and steering column were constantly improved for rigidity.

Between Tommi and his team mate, rising star Petter Solberg they ensured that the Subaru Impreza success story continued. Top and tail victories for Mäkinen in Monte Carlo, and Solberg on the Rally of Great Britain, combined with a string of podium places saw the Impreza carry the young Norwegian to second in the title race.

2003 - Subaru Impreza WRC2003

A prototype version of the latest Subaru Impreza WRC2003 was unveiled at the Paris Motor Show in October 2002 and it was immediately clear that this latest generation of Subaru's supercar had maintained the traditions of its predecessors. Once again the external changes have been evolutionary, rather than revolutionary but the latest car is the result of a new integrated design process between UK-based Prodrive and Subaru in Japan. Revisions to the engine, roll-cage, body panels and the car's overall aerodynamic

package are expected to have a major overall effect on the car's performance.

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