

# Subaru Tribeca TOW TEST

By Godfrey Castle

*Silky smooth, super silent and splendidly spacious, the new Subaru Tribeca is a brand new urban all-wheel-drive SUV with a factory-approved towing capacity of up to 2000 kg, if need be.*

The Tribeca is Subaru South Africa's first new model since 1997 and marks an entry into the 'five plus two seater configuration' sports utility market. There have been a number of stylish SUVs introduced into this fast-growing sector of leisure cars market – the Audi Q7, Hyundai Sante Fe, Ford Territory, Kia and Honda are the first that come to mind, and now, with the introduction of the Subaru Tribeca, it is getting more and more confusing as to which one to choose.

At R449 000 the Tribeca is approximately R100 000 plus cheaper than the Audi Q7 and my first impression on driving this limited-supply Tribeca was that it was silky smooth, super silent, splendidly spacious and more. But we have to take the good news with the bad: Subaru will only be bringing in 100 units for 2007, so if you are in the market, you have to remember that old adage, "you snooze, you lose!"

Subaru has carved out an impressive history over the past decade, ranging from winning the Tow Car of the Year competition in Europe twice to securing tough wins in hard-core motor rallying circles around the world. They have an excellent reputation in all-wheel-drive technology and safety, and as a result, boast an impressive Subaru company statement – research shows that 88% of Subaru buyers will buy another Subaru!

Powered by a six cylinder 3-litre flat horizontally opposed petrol engine and available in only in a five-speed automatic transmission,

## "it presents a lower centre of gravity"

the Tribeca has 180 kW at a high 6 600 rpm and 297 Nm of torque at 4 200 rpm. It is the same engine as used on the Legacy and Outback but has a stiffened block for use in the Tribeca.

The drivetrain uses a centre differential that distributes engine torque to the front and rear wheels in a ratio of 45/55 percent, which it will vary automatically up to a 50/50 ratio, depending on driving conditions. This leads to an above

average stability towing platform, hence its winning formula in the European Tow Car competitions.

A new innovation that should prove its worth for towing purposes is an electronic stability device called VDC (Vehicle Dynamics Control), which continuously monitors the vehicle's cornering attitude and which will intervene by reducing engine power, altering the front/rear torque split, or applying any of the four brakes selectively should the vehicle detect instability. This could be a wonderful feature should a caravan or boat start to fishtail badly.

There is also another advantage that the Tribeca has over its competitors: the flat six engine presents a lower profile than other engines, and since it is lower to the ground, it presents a lower centre of gravity, hence an advantage in stability.

Whereas Subaru is confident about the Tribeca's 2 000 kg towing capacity, South African law limits it to its tare mass of 1 940 kg. It is a substantial vehicle and actually weighs in at 45 kg more than the Toyota Fortuna, yet it doesn't look as big.

## Towing performance

The tare weight of the Tribeca would have allowed us to tow a much larger caravan than the Gypsy Rascal (at 1 100 kg) but timing and the supply of a





Driver and passenger seats are heated and fully electrically adjustable with memory settings and the clean-styled dashboard fascia includes controls for adjusting air conditioning to all three rows of seats. Other features include nine loudspeakers, RDS radio and attractive, subtle dashboard lighting.

larger caravan made this impossible.

A South African-made detachable towbar is available that takes the caravan to a near-perfect towball height of 460 mm after accounting for a 30 mm drop when the caravan was hitched on. When not required the towball stows away in a neat bag next to the spare wheel.

A word on this unusual engine: unlike most other six cylinder engines this is a large-bore, short-stroke engine that will rev to 7 000

## "88% of Subaru buyers will buy another Subaru!"

rpm and is equipped with AVCS (Active Valve Control System) and VVL (Variable Valve Lift), which allow for two distinct amounts of driving styles – boy racer or sedate and stately.

When towing, the Tribeca does seem to hold onto second gear well up into the rev range and, again, you can drive like a gentleman or you can awaken the little boy racer and the engine will scream all the way up to 110 km/h in second gear. This probably accounts for a fuel consumption of 17 l/100 km towing, but the consumption does come

down with the engine revs in the higher gears once travelling at a steady speed on the open road.

Brakes are first class too; stopping from 100 km/h in 3.01 seconds is quick, but probably the best feature is the all-wheel-drive system. You can accelerate from standstill on wet grass, accelerate on gravel and tow through the corners – all without developing any signs of wheel spin, just good traction.

The Subaru Tribeca scores way above average in the towing department; it should be equally as good with caravans weighing in at 1 500 kg. The silky-smooth ride is as good when the car is travelling solo as it is when towing. The Tribeca's suspension soaks up the movement of the Gypsy Rascal and this combination highlights the bliss of towing with a car that is not borderline in terms of power and weight. Stability while towing is simply excellent.

What don't I like? Initially the front styling with wide air intakes looked a little extreme but this grew on me. Another dislike is that to reset the onboard fuel consumption readout you need to depress the odometer, and in doing so you lose

This interior won the 'best interior' award in the premium-priced cross-over utility category last year. The rear seats fold flat to create a maximum 1 886 litres of luggage space.

## Towing Performance

Car:	Subaru Tribeca
Engine capacity:	3-litre boxer engine with 5 speed auto transmission
Tare weight:	1 940
Caravan:	Gypsy Rascal
GVM:	1 100kg

## Acceleration Performance

0 to 60 km/h	6.59 secs.
0 to 80 km/h	10.85 secs.
0 to 100 km/h	14.91 secs.

## Overtaking performance

60 to 80 km/h	5.25 secs.
80 to 100 km/h	10.85 secs
100 to 120 km/h	7.37 secs
Top towing speed	140 km/h

## Hill climb

1 minute seconds	35.22
---------------------	-------

## Braking

100 to 0 km/h	3.01 secs.
---------------	------------

## Speed in gears

(5-speed automatic)	
1st gear	60 km/h
2nd gear	110 km/h
3rd gear	140km/h

## Fuel consumption

At a steady 100 km/h	17.2 l/100 km.
Tow ball height with caravan	460 mm
Tow ball drop from normal height	30 mm

your distance travelled. There is also no luggage cover in the boot area. The rest I like, from the easy closing tailgate to the dashboard layout, air-conditioning throughout the vehicle (in the roof), fold-away third row of child seats in the loading bay, the overall drivability, the smooth engine, the road holding – do yourself a favour and drive one before all 100 are sold out!

