

IsThisCarOK

A briefing before you meet the seller

Know what to verify before you offer

2011 Subaru Forester AWD · Seattle, WA · 92,635 miles · Asking \$8,000 USD



Front three-quarter. Silver 2.5X body looks straight; roof rails present. Headlight lenses are already yellowed — typical for this age, budget for restorations or replacements.

Inspect on a lift first. \$8,000 is only fair if the engine is not burning oil.

This is not an automatic yes at \$8,000. It is also not automatically a scam listing. It is a 2011 Forester with this engine — the year Subaru switched to this 2.5, and the year that made oil consumption the question that decides whether \$8k is fair or a trap.

A fair private-sale band in Seattle for a verified-healthy example at ~93k miles is roughly in the mid-to-high \$7ks into the low \$9ks on paper — but only after engine health testing and documented oil use look honest. Without that, the asking price is a guess. An oil-burning engine that needs a major internal engine repair can eat \$4,000–\$7,000+ at an independent shop — close to what the car is worth.

Do not hand over money until an independent shop with a lift inspects it (~\$150–\$300). Book the first appointment of the morning on a cold engine. Check the oil level yourself before they start it. If oil use or engine health test fails the smell test, walk. If the shop is genuinely happy and oil consumption looks normal, \$8,000 can be in the conversation — still negotiate, still keep a repair cushion.

SAMPLE: photos are from the live Marketplace listing. Seller identity redacted.

1. The decision in two minutes

Inspect on a lift first. \$8,000 is only fair if the engine is not burning oil.

Confidence: LOW. This is listing research, not proof of mechanical condition. Unknown means unknown until the vehicle or shop confirms it.

Vehicle	2011 Subaru Forester
Asking	\$8,000 USD
Odometer	92,635 miles
Engine	2.5L engine
Transmission	Unknown
VIN	Not supplied

What we know — and what still needs checking

Item	Current value	Evidence status
Odometer	Unknown	Unknown
Engine	Unknown	Unknown
Transmission	Unknown	Unknown

2. What the 8 photos actually show

Photos help, but they never show the whole vehicle. Here is what is clearly visible, what may need attention, and what the photos do not show.



Front three-quarter. Silver 2.5X body looks straight; roof rails present. Headlight lenses are already yellowed — typical for this age, budget for restorations or replacements. Body looks straight from this angle; silver paint still reflective Both headlight lenses show yellowing/oxidation (common on 3rd-gen Foresters) Factory roof rails on; WA plate redacted in sample Listing shot only — no underbody, no engine bay, no interior



Front. Grille and emblem clean. Headlights cloudy/yellow on both sides. Lower fog housings look empty or dark. Plate is WA (redacted). Headlight clouding is obvious straight-on — ask seller about restorations already done Fog-light openings present; lenses look missing or blacked out in this shot Hood reflections show small white flecks — chips vs dust; check in person Harsh sun + alley photo — hides panel waves and rocker rust



Driver-front three-quarter. Alloys and paint look tidy from distance. Passenger headlight haze still visible. Photographer's shadow in frame — typical Marketplace snap. Multi-spoke alloys look stock-ish; tread not readable from this distance No obvious door dings or bumper scrapes in this crop Still no shot of rockers, wheel wells, or undercarriage (rust country for Subarus) Bright daylight flattens paint defects — walk the car in shade



Driver side. Profile is clean; rear glass tinted. Black cladding and rocker trim look intact from here. Headlight tip still shows haze. Driver-side body line looks straight; cladding intact Rear windows darker than front — cosmetic, not a health signal No close-up of rocker rust, jack points, or wheel-arch bubbles Fuel door on rear right (far side) — not useful from this angle



Passenger side. Same story as the driver side: tidy from 20 feet, yellowed front lamp, cracked lot under the car. Nothing here proves a clean underbody. Passenger-side panels look consistent with driver side Front passenger lamp haze again — budget for both sides together Lot surface is cracked/pebbled — irrelevant to the car, useful reminder these are street photos Still zero interior, engine, or lift shots in the ad



Rear three-quarter (passenger). FORESTER + PZEV badges, tinted hatch glass, WA plate. Paint still shiny; taillights look intact. Rear badges match a PZEV 2.5X Forester story Taillight assemblies look unbroken from this angle Hatch glass tinted; rear wiper present Useful for shape — not for head-gasket, CV boots, or frame rust



Rear three-quarter (driver). SUBARU / SYMMETRICAL AWD / PZEV badging clear. Black lower bumper trim shows light scuffs — loading wear, not fatal. AWD and PZEV badges visible; consistent with listing claim Minor scuffs on black rear bumper step area — typical cargo wear Rear tire tread looks decent from here (confirm with a penny/gauge) Panel gaps look even; still no underside photos



Straight rear. 2.5X + PZEV. Dual exhaust tips visible. Black hatch step pad present. Cleanest “what you’re buying” silhouette in the set — still exterior-only. 2.5X and PZEV badges confirm trim story from the ad Dual tips under the bumper — visual only; listen for exhaust leaks in person Rear bumper step pad and lower plastic look serviceable Eight exterior shots, zero cabin/odometer/engine — ask for those before you drive out

What you still cannot see — and must not skip

- oil consumption rate
- engine health testing
- transmission (automatic vs manual)
- service records
- engine-bay / underside photos
- title / lien status

3. The expensive jobs — in plain English

None of this means the vehicle in the driveway is doomed. It means you inspect for these items on purpose, because they are expensive and common. Think of it like buying an old house: the things that ruin the budget are the ones you check first.

Walk-away items

- Engine burning oil / internal engine wear — Dipstick drops between changes; oil light; spark plugs fouled; blue haze under load (\$4,000–\$7,000 major internal engine repair USD)

Known failure	Risk	How you may notice	Typical shop cost
Engine burning oil / internal engine wear	HIGH	Dipstick drops between changes; oil light; spark plugs fouled; blue haze under load	\$4,000–\$7,000 major internal engine repair USD
Cooling-system leaks / overheating	MED	Sweet smell, low coolant, overheat gauge creep, crusty residue	\$250–\$1,200 USD
Wheel bearings (front often)	MED	Hum/growl that changes with speed; sometimes with steering input	\$350–\$700 per wheel USD
Air-conditioning system	MED	Warm air in summer; clutch not engaging; oily dye at fittings	\$600–\$1,800 USD
Worn rear suspension parts	MED	Clunk over speed bumps; loose feeling in back	\$400–\$1,200 USD
Catalytic converter / emissions fault	MED	Check-engine; failed emissions; rotten-egg smell	\$1,200–\$2,800 USD
Automatic transmission repair	MED	Delayed Drive/Reverse, flare on upshift, burnt fluid smell	\$2,500–\$4,500 rebuild; service is cheaper USD
Engine oil leaks	MED	Oil around spark plug tubes; mist on underside of hood	\$300–\$800 USD
Worn front suspension parts	MED	Clunks, uneven tire wear, vague steering	\$300–\$900 USD
Timing chain noise	MED	Rattle on cold start from front of engine that is not just injectors	\$800–\$2,500 diagnose first USD

Costs are independent-shop ballparks, parts and labour, before tax. A dealer is usually higher. Any one of the expensive items can exceed the vehicle's value.

4. Is the asking price fair?

Short version: \$8,000 USD is a ceiling, not an opening bid. Pay that number only after a shop finds no major problems — not in the driveway because the photos look pretty.

Comparable asking prices we found:

Where	What it is	Odo	Ask
Seattle metro, WA	2011 Forester 2.5X mixed trims, private + dealer asks (snapshot) Hand-collected US asking-price context, Sept 2026. Not fetched by our servers. Miles vary widely.	150,000 miles	\$6,500 USD
Puget Sound, WA	Higher-mile / thinner-story private Foresters Hand-collected US asking-price context, Sept 2026. Not fetched by our servers. Odometer readings in miles.	180,000 miles	\$5,500 USD

What a fair number looks like for this specific vehicle

If the inspection finds...	Then it is worth about	What to do
Normal oil use, healthy engine health test, clean shifts, no major leaks, tidy service story, Washington title clear	\$7,250–\$8,500 USD	Offer under ask. \$8,000 is near the top of “verified okay,” not the opening bid.
Mostly fine mechanically, but thin records, small leaks, tired bushings/bearings, or soft maintenance	\$6,000–\$7,250 USD	Subtract the shop’s 12-month list dollar-for-dollar from ~\$7,500.
Borderline oil use or “needs monitoring,” cats/bearings soon, A/C weak — bones still okay	\$4,500–\$6,000 USD	Only if you want a project and have cash reserved for the oil-engine risk.
Heavy oil consumption, failed engine health test, salvage/rebuilt title games, or seller blocks a lift inspection	Walk away	Do not “get a deal.” The next invoice is the deal.

5. What it may cost before repairs

A \$8,000 vehicle is not \$8,000. Tax, transfer, a history report, and a shop inspection are added to the seller’s price. Figures below are planning slots, not quotes and not Canadian Black Book.

Item	Low	High	Caveat
WA use tax (private sale) — rough combined state+local (10% on asking — not official)	\$808 USD	\$900 USD	Planning figure only. Combined rate depends on where you title. Confirm with WA DOL / a licensing agent. FMV rules can apply if the price looks low.
Title / plate fees	\$50 USD	\$150 USD	Licensing agent / DOL planning figure, not a quote.

Item	Low	High	Caveat
Vehicle history + lien check	\$40 USD	\$60 USD	Buy your own history report before you fall in love.
Pre-purchase inspection	\$150 USD	\$300 USD	Independent shop with a lift. Planning figure, not a quote.

The real out-the-door number is not \$8,000

Seller's price \$8,000 plus the items above is roughly \$9,048–\$9,410 before insurance, fuel, or a single repair. That is the number to compare against a cleaner vehicle.

6. A simple decision guide

You do not need to become a car expert. You need a yes, a maybe, or a no.

If this happens	Your decision
Seller will not allow an independent lift inspection, or VIN/title story is fuzzy	No. Be polite and leave.
History report shows salvage/rebuilt/flood, or a lien they cannot clear same day	No.
Oil is low with “fresh” oil, seller admits heavy top-ups, plugs fouled, or engine health test fails	No. Unless you knowingly buy a project at parts pricing.
Shop finds ordinary age items (worn wheel, suspension, or brake parts) but oil use and engine health test look honest	Maybe. Subtract that list from ~\$7,500–\$8,000 and offer that. Keep a repair cushion.
Shop is genuinely positive: no evidence it is burning excessive oil, clean engine health test, tidy leaks list, clear title	Yes, at the right price. Fair is often \$7,250–\$8,250. Start under \$8,000.
You like it but cannot afford inspection + use tax + a \$2,000–\$3,000 cushion	No. Valid. A cheap Subaru with no cushion becomes an expensive Subaru.

Recommended offer math (only after a decent inspection)

Start around \$7,250–\$7,500 for a verified non-oil-burning Seattle example with ~92,635 miles and a clear story. Add a little if there are real receipts (documented engine health test test, recent services). Subtract the shop's “do this year” estimate, dollar for dollar. Subtract hard if records are empty or oil use is “probably fine” with no proof — that needs proof, not reassurance. Do not start from \$8,000 and nibble \$100. \$8,000 is near the ceiling for a verified-okay private sale, not the opening. If they will not move after a report that is only “okay,” let this one go.

7. What you can check (no wrench required)

Do this even if you already booked the shop. You are trying to decide whether the vehicle is worth spending inspection money on — and whether the seller is someone you want to buy from.

At the viewing

- Hear the cold start. Walk up to a quiet engine. Do not let them warm it first. You want the first five seconds.
- Photograph the dash odometer. The listing says 92,635 miles. If the dash does not match, stop and ask why.
- Dashboard. Photograph the odometer and every warning light. Lights should come on with the key and then go out.
- Leaks, rust, tires. Fresh puddles, flaking steel, cracked sidewalls, and tire date codes (four digits on the sidewall).
- Test drive 15–20 minutes if you can: a hill, a merge, a few bumps. Shifts should not bang. Brakes should not pull.
- After the drive, look under the hood again for new drips.

Still hidden on paper — ask to see

- oil consumption rate
- engine health testing
- transmission (automatic vs manual)
- service records
- engine-bay / underside photos
- title / lien status

Five seller questions that matter

- May I photograph the VIN and dash odometer?
- How long have you owned it, why are you selling, and has it sat unused?
- May I see service and repair receipts — not just hear a summary?
- Any accidents, title brands, liens, rust repair, or structural welding?
- Will you allow a first-morning inspection at an independent shop I choose, on a lift?

FOR THE MECHANIC / SPECIALIST — hand these pages to the shop

Buyer is not a car person. They need a written lift PPI on this 2011 Subaru Forester, with findings and rough 12-month repair numbers. Prioritize the model-specific list and the known failures table. Buyer pages (photos, price, hustles, driveway checklist) are earlier in this PDF.

8. Vehicle identity — confirm before you start

Year / make / model	2011 Subaru Forester
Generation	3rd gen SH (2009–2013); 2011 introduced FB25
Drivetrain / cab / trim	AWD · 2.5X Premium
Engine (confirm on vehicle)	FB25 2.5L flat-four
Odometer (listing)	92,635 miles
VIN	Not on file — photograph door sticker / dash before work
Listing city	Seattle
Asking	Ask \$8,000 USD
Still unknown on paper	oil consumption rate; compression / leak-down; transmission (4EAT vs 5MT); service records; engine-bay / underside photos; title / lien status

If the VIN, odometer, or engine family does not match what the buyer brought you, stop and tell them before you spend inspection time.

9. Pay extra attention — known failures for this YMM

Buyer-facing language is in the front of the PDF. This table is for the bay: what fails on this generation, how it shows up, and typical independent-shop money.

Walk-away if confirmed

- FB25 oil consumption / rings / short block — Dipstick drops between changes; oil light; spark plugs fouled; blue haze under load (\$4,000–\$7,000 short block / major ring job USD)

Failure / system	Priority	Test / inspection requested	Typical shop \$
FB25 oil consumption / rings / short block	Walk-away	Dipstick drops between changes; oil light; spark plugs fouled; blue haze under load	\$4,000–\$7,000 short block / major ring job USD
Cooling leaks / thermostat / radiator	Watch	Sweet smell, low coolant, overheat gauge creep, crusty residue	\$250–\$1,200 USD
Wheel bearings (front often)	Watch	Hum/growl that changes with speed; sometimes with steering input	\$350–\$700 each corner USD

Failure / system	Priority	Test / inspection requested	Typical shop \$
A/C (compressor, condenser, leaks)	Watch	Warm air in summer; clutch not engaging; oily dye at fittings	\$600–\$1,800 USD
Rear suspension bushings / trailing arm clunk	Watch	Clunk over speed bumps; loose feeling in back	\$400–\$1,200 USD
Catalytic converter / P0420 territory	Watch	Check-engine; failed emissions; rotten-egg smell	\$1,200–\$2,800 USD
4EAT automatic service / rebuild	Watch	Delayed Drive/Reverse, flare on upshift, burnt fluid smell	\$2,500–\$4,500 rebuild; service is cheaper USD
Valve cover / cam carrier seepage	Watch	Oil around spark plug tubes; mist on underside of hood	\$300–\$800 USD
Front control-arm bushings / sway links	Watch	Clunks, uneven tire wear, vague steering	\$300–\$900 USD
Timing chain noise	Watch	Rattle on cold start from front of engine that is not just injectors	\$800–\$2,500 diagnose first USD

10. Shop inspection request

Please use your normal inspection process and your normal printed or digital report. This page only highlights the vehicle-specific questions the buyer needs answered; it is not a substitute for your checklist. Please include repair-now items, likely work within 12 months, measured results, rough repair prices, and whether you would keep shopping.

Type	Please include
Identity	Photograph VIN Confirm dash odometer Confirm engine and transmission
Test	Cold-start it. Note unusual rattles, misfires, smoke. Confirm oil level on the dipstick before starting if possible.
Test	Document oil condition; ask the buyer about reported consumption. Compression and/or leak-down on all four; comment on plug condition if plugs are pulled.
Test	Scan all modules for stored/pending codes (misfire, catalyst, A/C, ABS).
Test	Hoist: oil leaks (valve covers, cam carriers, rear main), coolant seepage, exhaust/heat shields, wheel bearings, CV axles, rear subframe bushings, brake lines.
Test	Transmission: identify 4EAT vs 5MT. Check fluid (if applicable), engagement delay, flare, shudder. Road test including highway if possible.

Type	Please include
Test	AWD behavior on a low-traction surface if safe; listen for bearing hum that changes with speed/steer.
Test	Cooling system pressure test; thermostat/radiator condition; any head-gasket-adjacent clues (without assuming EJ folklore).
Test	A/C performance; cabin filter/odor; sunroof drains if equipped (Forester carpet wetness is a classic).
Test	Tires (date codes + uneven wear), brakes, alignment clues.
Test	Please list anything likely to cost money in the next 12 months, with rough USD numbers. We are non-mechanics buying a daily driver in Seattle.

11. Buyer driveway sheet — take this page with you

Print this last section. Fill it in standing beside the vehicle. If too many boxes stay empty, you are not ready to buy.

Fact	Write it here
VIN (17 characters, door sticker)	
Miles on the dash (photograph it)	Should be about 92,635
Oil level before start (photograph dipstick)	
Seller's oil-add story (qt per ____ miles)	
Cold start: quiet / tick / smoke	
Warning lights after start	
Transmission: automatic / manual / other	
Highway hum / bearing growl	
A/C cold? Carpets dry?	
Tire date codes	
History report / lien result	
Seller allows our lift PPI? Y/N	
Shop 12-month work estimate	\$
Our offer, if we make one	\$

Phone numbers

- No named lift shop on file for Seattle. Write in the shop you booked, with phone, before you go.