

Wareham, Massachusetts

Factory Five 818S

The best Subaru WRX-powered car you can build.

When Factory Five Racing announced an open house to debut its new 818 roadster, I figured I'd stop by and maybe take a drive. I envisioned a few gearheads trekking to company headquarters, scoping out the bare chassis, and maybe grabbing a burger. Instead, it turned out to be the Woodstock of kit cars. A bus shepherded the faithful from remote overflow parking as a dense crowd gathered for the big unveiling of the street-model 818S and track-ready 818R. Wheel time would have to wait.

A month later, I got my crack at the 818S, the car that 229 people have ordered on pure faith (another fifty-seven have ordered the 818R). It's home-assembled from a 2002–2007 Subaru Impreza WRX repurposed into an 1800-pound, mid-engine two-seater. The kit costs \$9990, so even with an unreasonably cherry WRX donor, the bang for the buck is hard to beat: a Porsche 911 Turbo's power-to-weight ratio for the price of a well-used Boxster.

Even though I wouldn't be driving the fearsome 400-hp R, I booked a local airstrip to wring out the 265-hp 818S. This is a ferociously quick machine. Subaru's turbocharged flat four is distinctive in terms of power delivery and sound, so it's weird to hear that signature *blat* chortling away right behind your ears. The 2.5-liter's sudden disbursement of turbo power—which hits all at once at 3500 rpm—is that much more exaggerated when it's flinging around a needle-nose roadster rather than an AWD sedan.

I'd estimate 0 to 60 mph is in the mid-to low-four-second range, and it feels even quicker thanks to the lack of sensory filters. The turbo's inhalations, the wind rushing past, and pebbles ticking up off the pavement are all part of the hard-wired experience. Factory Five kept the 818S interior simple and comfortable, but the overall vibe is more race car than anything from a showroom.

It's also a case of addition through subtraction. The steering is a WRX rack without the power assist, and it feels

wonderfully quick and direct in a way that no Subaru ever has. The rear wheels can handle the power, although you should opt for the Cusco limited-slip differential—less for getting off the line than for stabilizing the rear end on deceleration, as I discovered when lifting abruptly for a 90-degree corner and spinning gracefully onto the grass.

The donor WRX offers a preponderance of performance parts, from limited-slips to cantaloupe-sized turbos. I'd want a short-shift kit and unique wheels to keep Subie fans from asking why I put WRX rims on a convertible. Factory Five also offers bodywork accessories, including affordable carbon-fiber pieces and a towering rear wing that requires a reinforced deck lid to handle the downforce. The 818S looks cleaner without it.

Maybe 286 units do not sound like much, but in the kit-car world, that's a huge response. It seems there's a healthy supply of people who love the idea of an affordable, lightweight, mid-engine roadster, a WRX from an alternate reality. Now all those customers have to do is build it. — EZRA DYER



THE SPECS

Price: \$9990 (plus the cost of a Subaru Impreza WRX donor car)
Engine: 2.5L turbo flat-4, 265 hp, 244 lb-ft **Drive:** Rear-wheel

