

CAR IMPORTERS

QUESTIONS OF IMPORT

Can The Quality Of Service And The Quality Of Car Offered By Independent Japanese Vehicle Imports Really Be As High As We've A Right To Expect? Jonathan Crouch Puts It To The Test

If buying an imported Japanese car is one of these things you've thought about but decided against, then it's understandable.



After all, it's hard enough to choose the right model without wondering whether it legally complies with the complicated process of Single Vehicle Type Approval (SVA). Moreover, as a buyer, you want a proper UK registered vehicle, which means steering clear of companies who expect you to complete the registration process yourself. Others will fob you off with an Irish-registered vehicle, recognisable by funny number plates and strange paperwork that makes re-selling the car a nightmare.

Even if you *do* find a reputable operator, it's hard to know whether the cars they stock will have been properly prepared and what kind of dubious past history they may have had. Plus any doubts on either score must usually be tampered by the realisation that with the limited stock available at most operators, you either take what's there or take a walk.

As a result of all this, that would normally be that. Case closed, too much hassle. Were it not for the huge savings and choice to be found by going this route. Which leaves that nagging doubt. Is it possible to marry peace of mind with performance at low prices?

There are plenty of importers who will promise to do it, though a few well-judged questions will whittle down the list. Get them to explain in writing how they comply with SVA. Ask how the car has been converted to UK Spec. What kind of guarantee do you get that mileage and history are as described, and will Full UK Registration, MOT, Road Tax and a decent warranty be included in the advertised price?

If the company you're talking to can satisfy you on all those questions while still offering substantial savings, the clinching factor may be choice. Assuming that like most buyers, you want a used car, then the buying experience should be just like buying a new model from a franchised dealer. In other words, a wide choice of specs and colours and sensible delivery times.

Reputable importers with the clout to carry this amount of stock are few and far between – but they do exist. Which leaves only the question of the quality of the cars they sell. Importers can talk about pre-delivery inspections and verified vehicle histories until they're blue in the face and very often do. For the most of us however, it's still difficult to shift that nagging doubt that somehow, the quality and reliability of a Japanese import won't be quite up to the standard of an identical car bought through the ordinary UK dealer network.

Time to put that to the test – and to do so properly. We selected an importer that seemed to meet all the quality criteria necessary for a transaction of this sort. Enviroscope Ltd have bases in Kent, Surrey and Sussex and seem to understand the importation process and Single Vehicle Type Approval backwards. They only stock guaranteed UK-registered vehicles that have fully completed the SVA process and come with an MOT, Road Tax, a BIMTA guarantee that mileage and History is genuine and a minimum six months warranty.

What made this company stand out however, was their access to over 40,000 vehicles a week through a system they've developed with a network of export companies all over Japan. They've always got a UK stock of at least 150 vehicles, but if what you want isn't in that little lot, then the procedure's quite simple. You simply log on to their web site, (www.car-imports.com) then order your choice from the thousands of cars available. Thanks to their vast shipping connections and knowhow within the import industry, Enviroscope boast sensible delivery times on ordered vehicles, getting the car to your doorstep before you've had a chance to properly boast about it to your friends.

But what about the quality of the cars they stock? If cars from a company like *this* can't make the grade, then you'd have to question the standards of the whole Japanese import industry in the UK. To put their selection and preparation standards to the test, we devised the toughest test imaginable. A high speed 2000 mile dash across Europe, then two days pounding round the world's toughest racetrack, the 20km 120-corner Nurburgring Nordschliefe circuit, in the hands of professional drivers. Then back across Europe to Britain's toughest test facility, the Palmersport Bedford Autodrome, for a final session

designed to test the cars to the limit. All this to be completed in just five days. If any car was to be faulty in any way, this test would reveal it.

Denying Enviroscope the opportunity to specially prepare any of their vehicles for the test, we took two of their cars at random - a Mazda Eunos (MX-5) and a Subaru Impreza WRX STi - and ran them in convoy over the period of the test with a range of brand new performance cars sourced from UK franchises. The results were impressive. We found the standards of reliability, fit and finish to be exemplary on both the Subaru and the Mazda. Nothing rattled, squeaked or fell off and after 4,000 miles of punishment, we were happy to drive home in them. To prove that it was no fluke, we also tested an Enviroscope-sourced Honda S2000, one of their speciality models. Again, the same quality and preparation attention to detail was in evidence.

So, case proved? It's really up to you to ask the right questions and decide whether the savings being offered are worthwhile. If like us, you decide to use Enviroscope as a benchmark for answers and prices, then you can contact them on the numbers below:

Email – <mailto:info@car-imports.com>

Website – <http://www.car-imports.com>

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