



2BE OR NOT 2BE



Text by Michael Semira // Photos by Paul Rachwal

Toyota Supra, Nissan Skyline and Mazda RX-7 – these are the vehicles that usually come to mind when trying to name Japan’s supercars. Capable of producing insane amounts of power, many import enthusiasts would call these cars Asia’s answer to Ferraris, Lamborghinis and Aston Martins. However, Arthur Chiang of Mississauga, ON has been a long-time advocate of adding the Subaru Impreza to that exclusive list. To help his case, he built a 1999 Subaru Impreza 2.5RS as his personal Chiang-spec WRX, not only out-performing and out-styling Subaru’s very own WRX, but almost every other Japanese AWD platform we’ve ever seen.

One of the founding members of the Toronto Subaru Club (which was originally named the 2.5RS Club of Toronto), this Rockstar Games employee was the club’s resident tech guru. Starting first on his own ride, Chiang honed his skills working on his friends’ cars and a small group

of local clientele (I was lucky enough to have him install a used A’PEXi SAFC in my own 1999 Subaru Impreza back in the day). Word quickly spread around the Subaru community about Chiang, eventually earning him a spot as a tech on Subaru’s Canadian Rally Team and even competing in a variety of motorsports events himself.

It’s hard to imagine that this gearhead would trade the mud and dirt of rallying in favour of the glitz and glamour of the show circuit, but after a major accident, he felt it was time for a change. “While en route to a winter rally, I hit a patch of ice and rolled the car,” says Chiang. “Afterwards, I decided to retire the car from motorsport and enter the show scene.” After taking a look at what he’s been able to put together in just two years, it’s obvious that Chiang isn’t just your run-of-the-mill grease monkey.

Drawing upon the inspiration offered by the WRC and *Gran Turismo*, Chiang knew that the

Subaru GC8 Impreza had plenty of potential. “In the 2.5RS, I saw the potential for building a ‘Japanese Supercar’ long before the WRX was ever announced for North America,” says Chiang. However, it wasn’t until watching a video featuring Trial’s Try R widebody Impreza that he found a direction to take for his build.

Auto experts might liken Chiang’s ride to Subaru’s ultimate first-gen Impreza – the 22B. With its fat fenders and gorgeous blue hue, there’s no denying the similarities between the two cars. However, he was on a mission to build something that was truly next-level, a vehicle that would surpass even the best that Subaru’s engineers had to offer.

Chiang didn’t want to settle for anything less than Trial’s Try R widebody kit to dress his Impreza. But the kit is incredibly rare, with only five of them existing in the entire world – including the kit on the actual Try R Impreza. After exhausting >>



This is the cleanest Subaru engine bay we've ever seen. The melon-sized Garrett GT3076R turbo makes it one of the most potent street Subarus too.

his extensive list of industry connections (including myself), he discovered that Trial Japan had shipped a full version of the kit to Phoenix, AZ in anticipation of opening a US office. The kit was intended for a US version of the Try R Impreza that would be built by Trial for demo purposes. Fortunately for him, Trial USA's opening was delayed indefinitely and the kit became available. Faster than you can say Fuji Heavy Industries, the excited Chiang made the payment and shipping arrangements with Trial Japan and had it sitting at home within a couple weeks.

Trying to fit the kit onto his mangled Impreza was going to be quite a chore, but Chiang knew that the team at Velocity Autobody would be up to the task. But before the crew could start any paint work, he gave the GC8 a 'Paris Hilton' and stripped it down to the bare shell. Taking an old-school approach to the build, Chiang took extra care in ensuring that all the angles were squared before letting Velocity loose on the car. He even decided to shave the engine bay of all welds to give it a super clean look. The car was then shot with Kawasaki Candy Thunder Blue paint, as

Chiang wanted to maintain some of the car's WRC heritage but inject a personal touch.

Trial's 10-piece 'Blister' kit gives the GC8 some serious attitude. With only the factory roof, doors and trunk remaining, Chiang's Impreza underwent the ultimate Nip / Tuck operation, and is one of the wildest first-generation Imprezas on the planet.

Though Chiang's Impreza had been living with an EJ20 transplant for a number of years, the engine stayed relatively stock to be reliable. Under his new plans, not only would the 2.0L setup have to look pretty, but be capable of producing big horsepower as well. Teaming with forced induction guru Alain Navarette of NHR in Mississauga, ON, the two mapped out a setup never seen in an Impreza before.

With Chiang swapping WRX STI RA heads onto the 1999-spec EJ20 block, Navarette plumbed a watermelon-sized Garrett GT3076R turbocharger into the system. Massive four-inch (intake) and three-inch (exhaust) polished piping wraps around the engine bay like a Python, allowing for the BMC Carbon Dynamic Airbox to feed the motor. A trick Lateral Performance intercooler / radiator com-

bination unit handles cooling, while a Blitz Dual Drive blow-off valve and GRReddy Type C 47mm wastegate regulate boost level. With Vibrant silicone connectors used to hold things in place, a BPM equal-length manifold leads the combusted fumes through a custom down-pipe and out the HKS Carbon Ti exhaust.

A collection of braided lines carries the brake fluid, fuel and coolant, while the system's wiring was tucked away from view. With Power Enterprise 850cc injectors feeding the engine, the Autronic standalone engine management has Chiang's Impreza producing a very WRC-like 350hp and 300ft/lb of torque at all four wheels.

For rolling stock, Work Meister S2R wheels were supplied by Rev Competition Products in Richmond, BC, while Bridgestone hooked Chiang up with a set of 255 / 35 - 18 Potenza RE050 tires. The 18- x 9-inch two-piece rollers offer plenty of cooling for the Wilwood Superlite brake upgrade at all four corners. Using a 13-inch rotor / six-piston caliper combo up front and 12-inch rotors with four-piston calipers in the rear, these brakes provide Chiang with chest-caving stops. >>



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Rear seating was removed in favour of two Clarion PWX1552 15-inch subwoofers housed in a custom enclosure and a pair of Clarion DPX2250 amplifiers

Due to the car's previous motorsport escapades, Chiang's Impreza has gone through a number of suspension setups. Currently, the car sits on A'PEXI N1 Type Pro / Type V coil-overs. A set of JDM 17mm sway bars was installed underneath, while carbon fibre strut bars from STI (front) and Cusco (rear) solidify things topside. The factory control arms have been replaced with STI pieces at both ends, as well as the lateral links that are paired with Rev-Lab aluminum endlinks. A Rev-Lab quick ratio steering rack was also installed.

To complete the build, Chiang turned to his long-time friend (and our freelance tech editor) Dave MacKinnon. MacKinnon, who shares Chiang's passion for Subaru, had no problem supplying the ride with a selection of Clarion's best products, including the high-end Clarion DRZ9255 head unit that is the control centre of the system.

The absence of the rear seats offered Chiang with plenty of space for his sound system, and a pair of new Clarion PWX1552 15-inch subwoofers take up every last inch of it. Using the faces from another set of Meister S2R wheels as grills, the woofers are housed in a custom enclosure and powered by a Clarion DPX11500 amplifier that is mounted in the trunk. Behind and atop the subwoofer enclosure are two Clarion DPX2250 amplifiers. One amp is dedicated to the midrange drivers from a set of Clarion SSS600 components, while the second amp drives the tweeters from the component set. This, combined with the source unit's ability to control the output level, crossover frequency and time alignment for each speaker, means the system can be adjusted and tuned perfectly.

All three amps sit on custom-cut Lexan which is trimmed in carbon fibre and black suede. An Optima Yellow Top battery was installed between the amp racks to accommodate the extra power demands and 0-awg wiring keeps it flowing

smoothly. Visual entertainment is provided by a 7-inch VGA monitor mounted in the dash and Arthur's 'choix du jour' of game systems – it changes from show to show.

As he predicted, the completed project has been terrorizing the show circuit for the past season. His list of achievements is too long to list, but highlights include hardware from Import-Fest Toronto, SEMA IAS, Funkmaster Flex / Performance World, SCP and CSCS. Thanks go out to everyone that lent their support, especially Clarion, Rev Competition Products / Work Wheels, Shinzowerks (graphics) and to Mike Fu (amplifier racks) and Nick Howard (subwoofer enclosure) for their help with the audio install. A special shout out goes out to the R-Squadron family, as well as the hard working people at NHR, Can-Jam Motorsports, Velocity Autobody and ShinzoMedia. Congrats to Chiang for piecing together an awesome vehicle; showing that your own supercar is just a little elbow grease and creativity away. **PAS**

