



Fancy a BMW?

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Tom Scanlan dips into BMW's current line-up and reckons there's one for everyone... provided you've got at least £17,300.

BMW's cheapest car is the 114 (with a 1.6 engine) available from £17,300. Yes, you could go the HP or leasing route if funds are not readily at hand, but just over seventeen grand isn't bad for a BMW. Oh, I forgot: I bet you couldn't actually get one for so little. Why? The optional extras, of course. But let that be a battle between you and your dealer.

Big words in BMW's vocabulary at the moment are 'efficient dynamics.' The men in Munich are not unique in aiming for the best way to get a good compromise between low fuel consumption and cleaner exhaust emissions without losing straight-line performance. Good thing, too. It's just that Efficient Dynamics is their strap-line.

320d SALOON

The 'ordinary' 320d saloon is a particularly good example. Years ago, I ran a Porsche 911; its top speed was 146 mph and it could reach 60 in 7.5 seconds. The BMW 320d, a mere saloon, has almost identical figures. However, its fuel consumption in the combined cycle is an official 61.4 mpg, whilst I was happy with 30 mpg. And the exhaust emissions - I dread to think in the old Porsche, but the BMW's 120g/km mean a mere £30 annual road tax.

Move onto Efficient Dynamics and what is achieved? The Efficient Dynamics 320d has longer gear ratios (and is a mere half a second slower to 62 mph), reduced friction components and revised electronics. Result: 68.9 mpg combined cycle and 109 g/km



exhaust meaning just £20 per annum road tax. This emissions level is retained even when the car is fitted with the eight-speed auto gearbox (a brilliant device in itself). Further enhancing ED are electro-mechanical power steering that consumes no energy when the car is driven in straight lines or steady-state cornering. The 320d ED also has 16 inch aerodynamic alloy wheels and non-Run-flat tyres that together aid efficiency.

I found the Efficient Dynamics BMW no less enjoyable to drive than other 3 series saloons. However, notwithstanding the very attractive interior and out-of-sight safety and convenience technologies and a basic price of £28,080, the test car's total price was £35,775. It's a simple fact with German prestige marques that optional extras (some of them, admittedly, almost irresistible!) are going to add many thousands onto the basic price. The 3 Series cars account for the largest proportion of BMW sales. The 1 Series is the first BMW for many. (Multiply the cheapest 1 Series by five and you get the Munich marque's fastest-ever production car - the M6 Coupe, capable of hitting 62mph in just 4.2 seconds. £93,820 for this car.)

1 SERIES

The 116d, from £20,885, was the first sub-100g/km BMW, therefore with no VED to pay; 74.3 mpg is the official combined cycle and a potential range of more than 800 miles between fill-ups. Between the cheapest and the most expensive, there is for example, the 125D hatchback. This has compact practicality with good performance from its sizeable diesel engine... my £33,400 M Sport test car was a really nice drive. The same engine is also available in the X1; at first, with quite some audibility from under the bonnet, you might think that there could be greater refinement here and the steering feels heavy. Once under way, though, and especially on the open road at cruising speeds, neither is a problem.

The 320 bhp M135i, from £29,995, and one of the new range of 3-door 1 series cars; now here is a car that really impressed me. The biggest BMWs with huge horse power are fabulous, but the M135i is of course much more affordable, cheaper to run and just as much fun. It goes beautifully, with that super-smooth BMW 6-cylinder engine allied to the auto box, which can change gear faster than the human hand. This car is a sub-5 seconds to



62mph performer. The steering is excellent and the steering can be the first thing that makes us think, 'Wow, I like this car!', even if we don't perhaps consciously realise it

M3 500 LIMITED EDITION CONVERTIBLE

Having said that, I had to say 'Wow!' even more loudly when it came to sampling the M3 500 Limited Edition Coupe. Fantastic performance, but easy to handle if you're sensible; try it on a track day, it'll be better than the world's best fairground ride, even if costs a lot more -- £63,080 for the particular car I tried. The 500 offers a higher level of exclusivity and individuality, including stitching in the leather that matches the car's body colour; there's also £4000' worth of extras for an outlay within the purchase price of only £1000. My drive in the 500 was at a cost of 14 mpg - ouch!

In spite of this, BMW cars have, taking the range as a whole, been judged to have the lowest CO2 emissions per BHP, by 8-10% compared with their German rivals.

M6 CONVERTIBLE

With UK temperatures hardly still above freezing at the time of writing, we can only dream of open-air motoring. At the top of the range is BMW's M6 Convertible. It's a very quick car, of course (with a quick hood, too)... as you should expect, with 560 bhp available from its V8 engine. BMW says this engine is no less than 30% more-efficient on performance and economy (I got 20 mpg, according to the trip computer) than its predecessor.

Hugely entertaining, but not without its little annoyances, such as the fiddling it took to get the car into 'P' for park. £99, 020 gets you the basic car, but nobody will do that, will they? The test car came out at £114,000, but that did at least include ceramic discs for anyone who has to drive fast all day down mountains.

X6 M50d

No less impressive is the X6 M50d. This big lump (test model £73,845) now has an awesome 3.0 litre engine that is triple turbocharged. The points at which exhaust-driven turbo



number 2 comes in (at 1500rpm) and turbo number three (at 2600rpm) are indiscernible. Totally discernible is the surging performance, with full torque at 2000 rpm and full power at 4000 rpm. In practice, there's little need to use full power, except when you become addicted to it, which is all too easy. All of these M BMWs, petrol and diesel, make intoxicating noises, too.

3 SERIES TOURING

Additions late last year include the latest 3 series Tourings. These estate cars offer class-leading luggage carrying capacity alongside a pleasing driving experience. The automatic opening tailgate is standard. Sampling the 330d certainly underlined that BMW continues to focus on keeping entertained whoever is behind the wheel. The cars are fun. Not that the passengers are in any way discomforted; on the contrary, riding in the other front seat, or in the back, is still as pleasant as ever, with smart and well-designed seats and space.

5 SERIES

5 series BMWs now come in Grand Turismo form; the 520d GT is the entry-level in this mid-range sector. It starts at £35,705. Recognise it by its new coupe-look rear quarters.

Last but not least, following on from the 5 series version, BMW have introduced ActiveHybrid3. Buyers keen on travelling the eco route should examine the possibilities that this car offers, that is if electric power appeals as a partner to the standard 335i engine. In this case 55 bhp can be added to the 306bhp, making the car faster than the 335i by 0.2 of a second to 62mph. Pure electric power is good for 2.4 miles. For some, it may be a step too far at the moment and the extra cost over the 335i is significant.

7 Series saloons continue to offer extraordinary performance, particularly in handling, and fat-cat comfort for big-wigs and chauffeurs.

The prices quoted are either the basic start-point or the actual cost of the particular cars driven. Options are bound to add on a few or many thousands of pounds. Overall, BMWs



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remain on the whole to be thoroughly enjoyable cars to drive and travel in.