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New BMW 7 Series Limousine Road Test

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The New BMW 7 Series for High-Tech Executive Travel



Writes David Miles (Miles Better News Agency)

Unless you are a high ranking government minister, royalty, a high flying business executive or a chauffeur, chances are you will not travel in, let alone drive, the new sixth generation BMW 7 Series limousine. Showing the new flagship's high-end executive car status, these new models were very much in evidence recently, carrying the likes of Merkel and Cameron to and from the EU/UK negotiations in Brussels.

What is also remarkable is that this new specialist niche model range was one of the seven finalists, usually made up of volume selling models, in the 2016 European Car of the Year (COTY) award. The winner, the British-built new Vauxhall Astra, was announced on the eve of the Geneva Motor Show, 29 February. Judging the entrants were 58 COTY jury media members representing 22 countries. The finalists were the BMW 7 Series, Skoda Superb, Audi A4, Jaguar XE, Volvo XC90, Vauxhall Astra and Mazda MX-5.

So how did the 7 Series made the COTY final? Because it encompasses every piece of new automotive technology BMW can offer now, and will offer in future in more affordable models. These include its weight saving carbon composite body construction and pioneering driving support functions like their new gimmicky Gesture Control instruments - which is part of the build-up to autonomous travel. Plus of course there are specifics to the new 7 Series such as the spacious and luxurious interior and of course its premium brand status. This new range is a high-flyer for high-flying important people.

The new 7 Series range will not sell in huge numbers because the whole Luxury Saloon sector in the UK only accounted for a total of 9,061 registrations last year. BMW UK expects to sell 1,400 units in its first full year of sales. The principal competitors are the Mercedes S-Class, Audi A8 and the Jaguar XJ long wheelbase saloon.

Prices for the current 14 variant 7 Series range start at £64,530 and reach £79,970 but there are 740e plug-in petrol/electric hybrid and 6.6 litre V12, 592 hp petrol versions to be added to the line-up this year. Current engines choices are 3.0 litre petrol 740i 326 hp and 750i 449 hp units plus 3.0 litre turbodiesel 730d 265 hp and 740d 320 hp options. There is



also the choice of standard or long wheelbase body styles, M Sport spec and rear or xDrive all wheel drive systems. All models have an automatic transmission as standard. There is also a huge range of enhanced driving systems and personalisation options available.

Behind the Wheel

I have just had a luxurious driving spell in the 3.0-litre 730Ld M Sport long wheelbase turbodiesel version which has an on-the-road price of £72,260. But with lots of extra costs options added to showcase what is available, the final price was £95,615.

With its new technology carbon-fibre reinforced (CFRP) Carbon Core body the new 7 Series is both stronger and up to 130 kg (287 lb) lighter than before. The standard length body is a shade over five metres (16 ft 5in) and the longer version I tried is 5,248 mm (17ft 2in) giving an extra 140 mm (just over five inches) of rear passenger leg room. There is a 515 litre (18.2 cu.ft) boot as well. The new 7-Series is the largest production car the brand has ever built. The body retains the familiar BMW long bonnet, short front overhang, long wheelbase and set-back passenger compartment with a roofline that slopes gently to the rear but still gives that all-important executive car headroom despite the fitting of the £1,695 Sky Lounge panoramic glass sunroof.

The new 7 Series will always make a 'grand-entrance' because of its size and the now familiar kidney shaped grille which, for this model, is a larger Active Air Stream version to improve the blunt nose aerodynamics. Either side of the grille are standard LED headlights or the optional £2,450 Laserlight system. A wide lower air intake grille flanked by LED fog lights emphasises the width of this executive express. Depending on the model 18 or 19 inch alloy wheels are standard fit. The M Sport models have an exterior body styling package with unique design side skirts and front and rear bumpers, 19 inch wheels and illuminated door finishers bearing the M logo. Inside these versions have an Anthracite headlining and Fineline black wood interior trim inserts edged with high-gloss metal effect trim. Standard fit is luxury Nappa leather upholstery. There is absolutely no plastic trim used for the interior, it's all leather or wood.



Other standard fit or extra costs options include Remote Parking, Touch Command, sat-nav, four zone air con, electric front/rear windows, privacy blinds for the rear windows, Gesture Control, head-up display and ambient air freshener. A very useful extra cost option, bearing in mind the size of the saloon, was the £400 Surround View function. This uses the centrally mounted screen to show real-time camera generated images of the front, rear and side. Software also generates overhead views of the car's position, which is ideal and much-needed when parking in cramped public car parking spaces. For even more sophistication a £4,675 Bowers & Wilkins Diamond surround system was fitted to my test car. The car also had two tablet screens for rear seat passengers and a centrally positioned Samsung tablet on the rear centre armrest, to control various in-car functions for rear seated executives, including massaging seats which were thoroughly enjoyed by my female passengers.

In the front is the usual centrally-positioned BMW iController, there is BMW Online Services, real time traffic information, internet connection plus the various driving modes from ECO PRO through to Sport as well as lane departure warning, blind spot monitoring and radar braking. The 7-Series has self-levelling air suspension which can be adjusted for ride comfort and the car can be raised by 20 mm (0.8 in) to overcome rough road surfaces, and it automatically lowers by 10 mm (0.4 in) in Sport mode when travelling at high speed. The test car was also fitted with the Executive Drive Pro £2,250 option which studies the road ahead and adjusts the suspension to smooth the way over larger bumps. Sport mode stiffens the suspension, gives more weight to the steering and sharpens up the throttle and gearbox responses.

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Generally ride comfort is refined and handling for such a large car is composed. However poorer road surfaces and sections of tarmac made uneven by heavy lorries, caused the car to tram-line with the large wheels fidgiting in and out of the ruts, which on motorways is unsettling for the driver and passengers. It should glide over these imperfections but British roads don't allow that. That said it did make light work of my long journeys.



The 3.0 litre six cylinder turbodiesel engine uses the latest BMW TwinPower Turbo technology and this result in a 7 hp increase in output to 265 hp and peak torque is now 620 Nm (457 lb.ft) from 2,000 rpm.

All versions have an eight speed Steptronic gearbox, but it is a Sport unit with closer ratios for the M Sport version, which also features Launch Control – not a necessary requirement, I would have thought, for a limousine. Top speed is limited to 155 mph and zero to 62 mph takes just 6.2 seconds. From initial start up to open road acceleration the engine sound is subdued within the car and there is very little wind or road noise intrusion. Other features include Brake Energy Regeneration and Auto Start Stop. Selecting the ECO PRO mode brings into play a coasting function which decouples the powertrain in overrun phases while travelling at speeds between 31 and 100mph.

When it comes to fuel economy officially the Combined Cycle figure for the 3.0-litre 730Ld

M Sport version I tested is 56.5 mpg. My overall figure was 40.1 mpg driven in ECO PRO mode. The test drive period took in two 200 mile motorway journeys at legal speeds and another 100 miles of country roads and some in-town driving. I was happy with my real-life figure but far less happy that it was so far away from the official consumption.

However the official CO2 figure for this model is 132 g/km so VED road tax is currently only £130 a year – which, when you consider the cost of the car and its size, is minimal. Company car executives will pay 21% Benefit-in-Kind tax now and 23% from April. Insurance is rated Group 46.



VERDICT

All-new, and bristling with new technologies the BMW 7 Series is one of the cleverest luxury cars to drive and be driven in. I can see why it was a finalist in the 2016 Car of the Year competition.

For: Very spacious, sumptuous luxury quality interior, a technology powerhouse filled with the latest driving, communication and entertainment technologies, given its size and performance its cheap to run with low tax costs, a formidable flagship for the BMW brand.

Against: Unsettled handling on poor main road surfaces, real-life fuel consumption was good but fell well short of the official EU Combined Cycle figure, only a few people will get to



sample this luxurious and very clever limousine.

MILESTONES AND WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF:

BMW 7 Series 730Ld M Sport Saloon.

Engine: 3.0 litre, 6 cylinder turbodiesel, 265 hp, 620 Nm (457 lb.ft) of torque from 2,000 rpm.

Transmission: 8 speed Steptronic sports auto, rear wheel drive.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 6.2 seconds

Top speed: 155 mph (restricted).

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 56.5 mpg, (40.1 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 132 g/km, VED road tax £130, BIK company car tax 23% from April.

Insurance Group: 46.

Warranty: 3 years/60,000 miles.

Dimension/capacities: L 5,248 mm (17 ft 2in), W 1,902 mm (6ft 3in),

H 1,485 mm (4 ft 10.5in), long wheelbase 3,210 mm (10ft 6in), 4 doors 4/5 seats, boot 515 litres (18.2 cu.ft).

Price: £72,260 (£95,615 as tested).



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