BMW 430M Convertible Road Test

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The BMW 430M Convertible – Summertime Joy.

By Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

Summer is here, at least for a few days so convertibles will be at their best whilst the sun shines, especially the new BMW 430 soft-top.

If you believe cars are boring, think again. A bigger, bolder and better BMW 430 series now carries the German car-maker's honours where the famous 3-Series left off.

While the 3-Series continues as a saloon and estate, the 4-Series fills in with the very clever coupé and convertible styles.

Bigger outside and inside than the previous model, our 430 is all the better for it. You don't feel hemmed in tighter than in wet Kniebundhosen or get jostled as if at a beer festival near closing time, instead you can enjoy Alpine-like serenity and enjoy the view from the driving seat as the compliant ride wafts you along. That is, if you want to.

Because under your left hand just beside the six-speed manual gearbox lever is the rocker button which transforms the 430. Comfort, sport and expert-pro modes gradually transform the BMW 430 from subtle Sunday car to Saturday slingshot for a dash to Waitrose, the long way around.

The petrol-fuelled powertrain is superb. The engine's under 2.0 litres in capacity but you'd hardly know it, so quick and urgent in nature, unstressed and powerful, relaxed and comparatively quiet.

There is a surprisingly long travel clutch but it gives excellent feedback and you can creep along in cities without a problem, while the flick of the wrist action to the gearlever means minimum time off the wheel.

That too is well weighted for assistance and feel, with a good turning circle and no fidgety kickback, and sweeping bends allow you to settle into a flowing style with commanding confidence.

The uprated brakes on our M sport version were immensely powerful with light pressure effecting rapid deceleration and the traditional handbrake securely held it on a test slope we use.

The thought which has gone into the major controls carried over to the column and fascia switches, which were ideally placed and operated without effort but effectively.

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Passengers positively commented on the size and clarity of the info-tainment screen atop the fascia and the simple multi-function control from the central console, while the climate control system was excellent for an open topped car.

Oddments room was good for a car of this size with big door bins, a central box and trays as well as a good-sized glovebox and rear seat pockets. The 370 litre (13.07 cu.ft) boot space is, by contrast and necessity, very small in a car which looks as if it should be roomier. That's because the boot has to also accommodate the folded metal roof and its mechanism and it means only a very small overnight bag or a couple of shopping bags could be fitted inside when the roof is stowed. Folding or erecting the roof takes a few seconds and is a simple one-finger operation under the button.

Getting into the front seats is very easy (but it's a younger person's ability to slip into the back pair), and the seats are well-shaped with a very wide and effective adjustment range for driver and passenger. Legroom in the back is fair while in front it is very good and head-space is generous for a coupé.

Our test car was equipped with the self-dipping automatic lights but we found their operation a bit hit and miss. While being quick to sense and respond most of the time on a few occasions it simply did not and the driver had to take over, and this is a fault we have noticed on similar systems in other cars.

The automated wipers were also not to everyone's liking with regard to their sensitivity and timing but they did clear a big slice of glass and they had a very fast action if selected.

Noise levels were generally very low even when the engine was pressed to perform, with little road rumble or wind buffeting to disturb occupants either.

The BMW 430M showed it could be surprisingly economical, frequently passing 40 mpg on major road trips, while with urban driving as well it dipped to just under 30 mpg overall.

Whichever way you went, the journey was always enjoyable. With Comfort mode caressing you it was superbly comfortable and compliant while open country roads or motorways could be enjoyed with the firmer Sport setting to sharpen the chassis and powertrain.

Moving the modes from balmy to business and then into “bonkers” with grip assist slackened as you might for a track day, meant you really have three different cars under your control and coupled with having a coupé or convertible that really means six cars for the price of one.

VERDICT

Who said cars are boring? Not this stylish BMW 430M convertible.

For: Refinement, performance & economy, handling, ride

Against: Very small boot, option prices; our test car extras included red metallic paint, convertible and interior comfort packages, M Sport Plus brakes & modified suspension with 19-inch alloys, adaptive headlights and reversing camera which added up to an additional £4,300 to the standard price.

Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

BMW 430M Convertible.

Engine: 2.0 litre, four cylinder, 252 hp petrol.

Transmission: Six speed manual.

Performance:

0-62mph: 6.4 seconds.

Top speed: 155 mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle: 30mpg.

Emissions and taxation: CO2 162 g/km, VED road tax £185, BIK company car tax 29%.

Insurance Group: 36

Warranty: 3 years/100,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,638 mm 15.22 ft) W 2,017 mm (6.62 ft), H 1,384 mm (4.54 ft), boot 370 litre (13.07 cu.ft), 2 doors/4 seats.

Price: £44,705 (inc. options).