Latest BMW 3 Series – Road Test

Published: September 2, 2019

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/latest-bmw-3-series-road-test/



ALL-NEW BMW 3 SERIES SALOON SETS THE STANDARD AGAIN…

…says David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

The BMW 3 Series has been a two ‘marks’ model. Firstly it’s the ‘hallmark’ core model range in the extensive BMW model line-up. Secondly it’s the ‘benchmark’ model that other manufacturer’s models in the upper medium sized ranges of saloon and estates are compared to.

The new BMW 3 Series Saloon is the seventh generation stretching back over 40 years of sales in the premium mid-size segment. The Saloon range has sold over 15 million units

globally and it's considered to be the heartbeat of the BMW brand.

In the UK its premium brand competitors largely remain the same, being the Audi A4, Mercedes-Benz C-Class, Jaguar XE, with similar sized offerings from Lexus and Volvo and nor forgetting the new all-electric Tesla 3 falls into that mid-sized product category.

The new 3 Series Saloon with SE, Sport and M Sport spec levels has prices starting from £32,565 and just released is the 3 Series Touring estate range with prices starting from £35,565 with the same engines and spec levels choices.

So what does the new 3 Series Saloon bring to market that keeps it ahead of its competition? BMW say its precision, clean lines and bold contours are the hallmarks of the new 3 Series Saloon, which has had its proportions radically revised. The new car is 85 mm longer than its predecessor at 4,709 mm (15.45 ft), 16 mm (0.63 in) wider at 1,827 mm (5.99 ft) and just 1 mm (0.04in) taller at 1,442 mm (4.73 ft). Added to that its wheelbase has been extended by 41 mm (1.61 in) to 2,851 mm (9.35 ft) as have its track widths with the front now 43 mm (1.69 in) wider and rear by 21 mm (0.83 in). So essentially we now have more interior space, which could prove to be attractive to downsizers from the more expensive and larger 5 Series models.

It is also lighter and has improved aerodynamics which all help fuel and CO2 efficiency. At the front, the large BMW kidney grille elements are framed by a single surround and split up by wide bars and link to the headlight units. The customary twin headlights feature the familiar two-way split that is further emphasised by a notch in the front apron that rises into the headlight contour.



The bonnet has four contour lines leading to the kidney grille. Both the front foglights and the Air Curtains are integrated into the outer air intakes, which are inserted into the front apron in a horizontal T shape on SE and Sport models. To the side, with its coupé style roof over four doors, a pair of character lines rise to the rear of the car at door handle level and a contour line near the side skirts guides the eye to the sculpted rear wheel arches. Another BMW hallmark feature is the ‘Hofmeister kink’ – the familiar counter-swing at the trailing edge of the side window design The side contours lead into the rear apron and extend upwards via the rear lights to the spoiler lip on the boot lid. The rear slim, darkened light units house distinctive L-shaped taillights.



From launch, customers can choose from two non-metallic colours and ten metallic shades including the brand new Portimao Blue metallic which is unique to the top-selling M Sport model.

Inside it’s an evolution of what we have experienced before. The overall design accentuates the extra spaciousness but it still remains a driver-focused cockpit. The instrument panel has a modern light look with horizontal lines, high-quality electroplated trim strips and contours that extend into the doors.

The new instrument cluster and Control Display form a large surfaced screen grouping,

while the controls not included in these units are arranged into clearly structured function panels.

Displays and buttons for the air conditioning are at the centre of the instrument panel while the light functions are operated via a panel of buttons next to the steering wheel. The start/stop button for the engine is now positioned in a control panel in the centre console that houses the gearshift lever or newly designed selector lever, the iDrive Controller, electromechanical parking brake and the buttons for the Driving Experience Control switch unit.

The entry level SE models feature substantially increased standard specification. It includes Adaptive LED headlights with cornering light and eyebrow indicators, BMW Welcome Light Carpet, Interior Ambient Lighting with up to 11 colour settings, Parking Assistant with reversing camera and latest generation reversing assistant, Electric folding mirrors, Three-zone air conditioning and enhanced Acoustic glazing.

All 3 Series Saloon models benefit from 40:20:40 split rear seats and folding rear headrests as standard. The entry model features a leather Sport steering wheel and BMW Live Cockpit plus, with its 8.8-inch central instrument cluster.

The SE models get line-specific front and rear bumper design, and they also come with exclusive 17-inch light-alloy wheels or optional 18-inch wheels, bespoke door sill strips and LED front foglights.

The Sport model adds exterior features including BMW Individual high-gloss Shadow Line trim for the side window surrounds, plus kidney grille slats and trim elements for the

air intakes and rear apron in High-gloss Black. The Sport model’s interior features trim in High-gloss Black and Sports seats for the driver and front passenger. The Sport model also comes equipped with 18-inch alloy wheels, Vernasca leather seats and front heated seats.

The top-selling M Sport model features larger air intakes as well as a different design for

the front bumper, side skirts and rear apron. It also includes BMW Individual high-gloss Shadow Line trim, Kidney grille slats in high-gloss black, air intake trim in high-gloss black and a rear diffuser in Dark Shadow. Inside there are sports seats, an M leather steering wheel, an anthracite-coloured BMW Individual headliner and an interior trim in Aluminium Tetragon, new Vernasca leather seats trims and heated front seats. The M Sport model also features the new BMW Live Cockpit Professional with a 12.3-inch digital instrument cluster, 10.3-inch central instrument cluster and BMWs brand new Operating System 7.0 with the Intelligent Personal Assistant.

The upgraded four cylinder engines from the BMW Group's Efficient Dynamics family are used in the BMW 330i and the BMW 320d. The 3 Series Saloon features a new-generation six speed manual gearbox and the eight speed Steptronic transmission. As an alternative to rear-wheel drive, the BMW xDrive all-wheel-drive system is also available for the new BMW 320d.

Here we are concentrating on the best selling 320d unit. The upgrades to the TwinPower Turbo technology two litre, four cylinder diesel engines in the BMW 320d and BMW 320d xDrive models now includes multi-stage turbocharging which brings increased efficiency across all engine speeds. The revised diesel has a maximum output of 190 hp and a peak torque of 400 Nm (295 lb.ft), enabling the 320d manual to accelerate from zero to 62 mph in 7.1 seconds and the automatic in 6.8 seconds while the BMW 320d xDrive can get from zero to 62 mph in 6.9 seconds. Average fuel consumption for the manual version is 54.3 to 56.5 mpg and the automatic 53.3 to 55.4 mpg for the 320d and 49.6 to 52.3 mpg for the 320d xDrive. The 320d's manual gearbox model's CO2 emissions are 115 g/km and the automatic 110 g/km while the 320d xDrive's CO2 emissions are 118 to 120 g/km depending on the alloy wheel option.

My test drive in the new 3 Series Saloon was the 320d xDrive with the new Portimao (+£670) body colour and best selling M Sport specification priced at £40,165 on the road. Now that puts it above the £40k price threshold so an extra annual £310 VED price supplement has to be paid for five years from year two onwards.

The First Year diesel rate VED cost is £210 then Standard rate of £145 + £310. Company car drivers will pay 31% Benefit-in-Kind tax with the 4% rate added for all diesel powered company cars. If you chose the larger 19-inch wheels this pushes the CO2 up to 120 g/km so BiK increases by 1%.

In fact my test car had a final price of £47,855 because it was fitted with numerous showcase extra cost options such as the £1,800 Technology Pack, £1,700 Premium Pack, £990 Comfort Pack and £2,200 M Sport Plus package which includes 19-inch alloy wheels, M Sport braking System, Adaptive Suspension and M Sport rear spoiler. That makes it a very expensive proposition and probably not typical of what most users will choose. A 320d xDrive Saloon with M Sport spec without extra cost options still weighs in at £39,825 but as it's less than £40k it doesn't attract the unjust £310 added VED tax supplement.

The purchase price and the extra cost options are really the only negative issues about this latest 3 Series 320d M Sport model. In all ways the new generation 3 Series Saloon is improved, which given the success and refinement of past generations is surprising. It is beautifully poised and balanced in terms of handling, it rides flat and level and it is remarkably agile with the xDrive system adding further grip in poor weather conditions or during higher speed cornering. The M Sport ride is firm but still acceptably compliant and the new 3 Series Saloon remains the benchmark model in this competitive class.

The extra interior space is welcome and the interior is as always beautifully designed and of high quality. The retained cockpit design will appeal to any driver whether their preference is for comfort and refined driving or take a more sporting attitude to their time behind the steering wheel.

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The revised EU6.2 C & D Temp compliant 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbodiesel 190 hp engine has a strong and linear power delivery with 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque available from 1,750 rpm – which works beautifully with the eight speed automatic gearbox which also has

manual gear selection for those enthusiastic drivers. Even driven in EcoPro mode there was more than enough power delivery for swift acceleration and my week of test driving covering local commutes, winding country roads and some motorway cruises was done mainly in that mode with a resulting 47.4 mpg. That's not quite as good as the official figures of 49.6 to 52.3 mpg but very realistic given the performance. Top speed is 145 mph and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is 6.9 seconds.



VERDICT

Apart from the price what's not to like? It's another generation BMW 3 Series landmark premium segment mid-sized saloon.

For: The best in its premium mid-sized saloon sector just got better, brilliant handling, strong engine, comprehensive spec even without extra cost options, a joy to drive.

Against: Expensive and options add to that price and increase taxes.



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

New BMW 3 Series 320d xDrive M Sport Saloon.

Price: £39,825 (£47,855 as tested).

Engine/transmission: New EU6.2 C7D Temp 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbodiesel, 190 hp, 400 Nm (295 lb.ft), eight speed automatic with XDrive traction.

Performance: 145 mph, 0–62 mph 6.9 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 49.6 to 52.3 mpg (47.4 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 120 g/km, VED £210 First Year rate then Standard rate of £145 if it doesn't exceed £40k with extra cost options, otherwise add £310 annually for five years to that £145 figure, BiK company car tax 31/32% depending on wheel size.

Insurance Group: 31.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,709 mm (15.45 ft), W 1,827 mm (5.99 ft), H 1,442 mm (4.73 ft), wheelbase 2,851 mm (9.35 ft), boot 480 litres (16.95 cu.ft), four doors, five seats.