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Latest BMW 5 Series Road Test

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The new seventh generation BMW 5 Series saloon...

Test-driven by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

The BMW 5 Series has gone through six generations spanning 45 years and totalling 7.9 million global sales, and its success in longevity and sales terms means it has always been the benchmark range for the executive car sector.



The new seventh generation 5 Series Saloon arrived in February, shortly to be joined by the Touring Estate, plus a wider range of engines for both body styles – including 2.0d SE Efficient Dynamics, the plug-in hybrid 540e and V8 petrol M550i.

These are in addition to the confusingly named launch engines of 2.0 litre turbo petrol 530i, the 3.0 turbo 540i petrol, the more logical 520d 2.0 litre turbodiesel and the 530d 3.0 litre turbodiesel. UK customers can also specify BMW's xDrive four wheel drive system and a host of options including Integrated Active Steering which turns the rear wheels for added agility, and the must-have Variable Damper Control to smooth out ride comfort.

Prices of the new four door Saloons start from £36,410 and the five door Touring estate from £38,385. These prices have just been adjusted following the increase in UK VED road tax rates. For all brands of new cars bought after 1 April priced at over £40,000 on-the-road, there are extra costs. Lots of the new 5 Series models are in this category, so these incur the new added £310 VED road tax supplement rate for each of five years on top of the Second Year flat rate of £140.





The new elegant 5 Series Saloon in styling both inside and out largely resembles the bigger 7 Series Saloon. In addition much of the on-board driving aid technology such as Gesture Control, remote parking, semi-autonomous driving functions, Dynamic Cruise Control and the latest infotainment and connectivity systems, including Microsoft Office 365, have been filtered down into the new 5 Series either as standard or as extra cost options.

The latest 5 Series Saloon has more equipment, it's cheaper to run due to its 100 kg (220 lb) weight loss giving a near 50/50 weight distribution balance, it's slightly longer in length at 4,935 mm (16.19 ft) with a marginally longer wheelbase to improve rear passenger legroom, there is more headroom and the boot has an increased capacity of 530 litres (18.72 cu.ft). Wider opening doors front and rear with a new design of cut-out frames gives easier access. All together this latest 5 Series feels a more grown-up car which might attract down-sizers from the expensive 7 Series Saloon. Competitors for the 5 Series continue to be the Audi A6, Mercedes E-Class and Jaguar XF but there are similar sized alternatives carrying the Lexus and Infiniti brand names.



BMW UK expects to sell around 17,655 of the 5 Series Saloons in its first full year of sales with the 520d being the most popular. Specification choices so far, depending on the engine chosen, are SE, xDrive SE, M Sport and xDrive M sport. Prices currently top-out for the Saloon at £50,260 and for the Touring at £51,760.

My test car was the 520d xDrive M Sport Saloon costing £41,185, the popular xDrive all wheel drive option adding £2,000 to the price of the conventional rear wheel drive models. With a host of options fitted to showcase what is on offer, the final on-the-road price of my test car was a huge £50,555.

From the options list I'd choose the Variable Damper Control system at £985, this is a must especially with the larger 19-inch M Sport wheels and low profile tyres fitted, because for those drivers who cover long distances anything but the Comfort setting can be hard to live



with. I'd also choose the £335 split folding rear seat option which extends the load carrying space and if pushed the £1,495 Technology pack which includes display keys, head-up display, enhanced Bluetooth with wireless phone charging, Gesture Control and WiFi hot-spot preparation. Air con, sat-nav, electric windows and door mirrors, cruise control and driving mode selector all come as standard fit items. Nice to have would be the £1,995 Comfort package which includes a reversing camera, electric front seats with a memory function for the driver's seat and folding anti-dazzle door mirrors.

The M-Sport spec includes front sports seats, LED fog lights, M steering wheel, M aerodynamic body kit and an anthracite coloured roof lining.



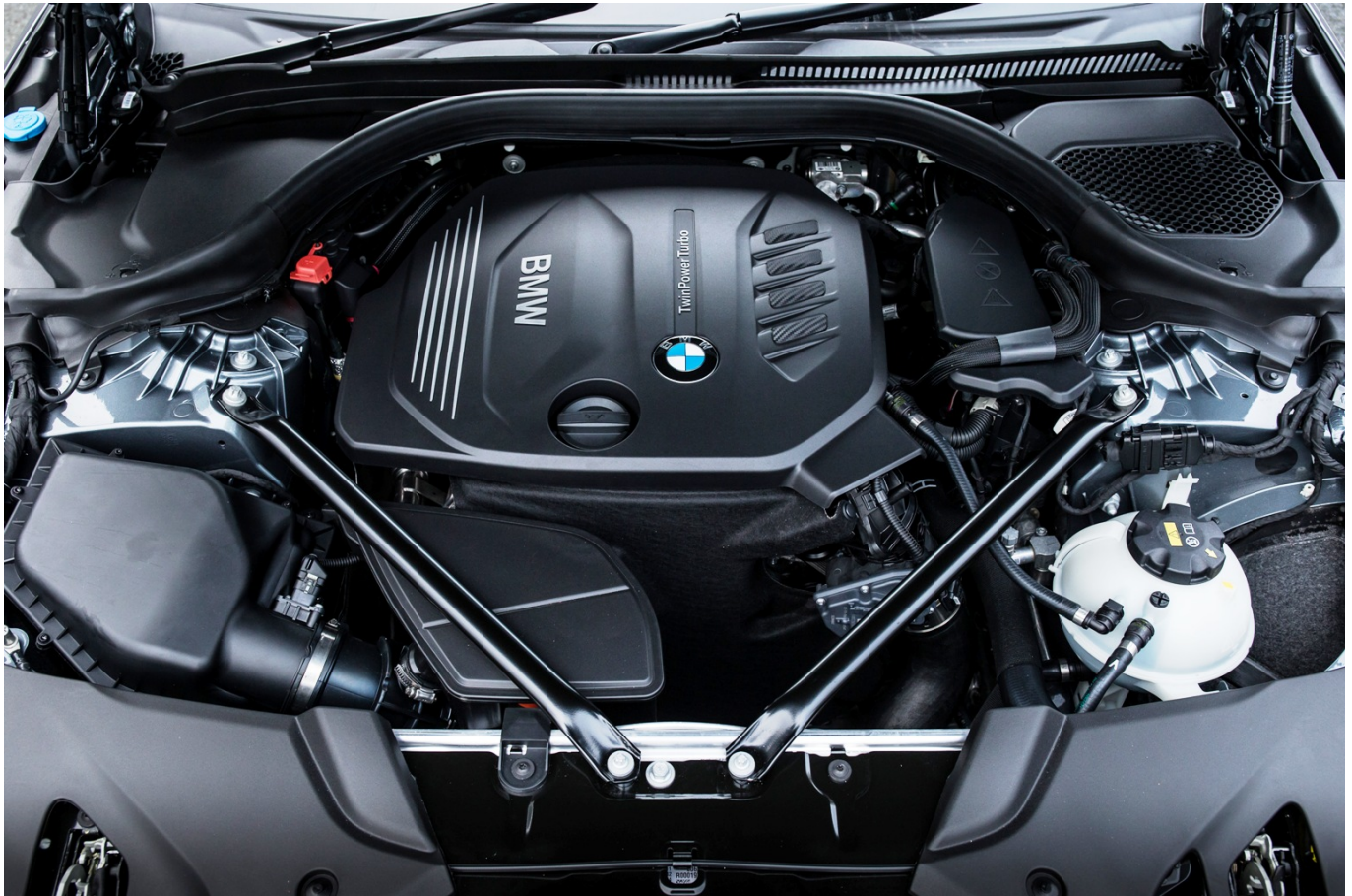
How do you distinguish the new 5 Series Saloon from its predecessors? Starting at the front



the circular headlights connect seamlessly with the famous BMW kidney grille. LED headlights are fitted as standard but adaptive units are an option with an anti-dazzle high beam with a range of up to 500 metres (nearly 550 yards). From the side there is the usual long bonnet but with a short front overhang, and with the coupé four door body cell set back in its overall long wheelbase configuration. At the rear the lights wrap around deep into the side of the car, connecting the flanks with the rear end. The exhaust tailpipes are now arranged symmetrically on both sides of all model variants and they can be circular or trapezoidal depending on the engine and spec level chosen. There is a reasonable sized boot lid, larger than before, but there is a high-ish rear sill to load items over into the boot and there are some bodywork intrusions into the sides of the boot which reduce its overall capacity.

Inside there is noticeably more space, especially headroom, and at the rear there is more leg and knee room. However the 40/20/40 split rear seats are more suitable for two adult passengers with the centre position only really accommodating a child. I think the folding rear seat option is a must as it allows easier side loading through the rear doors of the forward boot area, rather than placing extra luggage on top of the seats themselves, it will save wear and tear. The M Sport front seats are excellent and have Dakota leather as standard although there is an upgrade option of softer Nappa leather. The side bolsters are adjustable for added support and massage front seats with eight programmes come with the Comfort £1,995 package.

The fascia is another BMW work-of-art, clean and uncluttered with sensibly positioned controls and switches with a large centrally positioned touchscreen. Thankfully with all its new on-board technology adjustment for the most used heating and ventilation controls are not operated via the touchscreen. There is the usual centre console positioning for the latest rotary BMW iController and its associated short cut buttons. This system offers functions such as the sat-nav system although that can also be activated via the touchscreen, and the system also allows for the selection of destination by voice. I personally didn't find the Gesture Control, part of the £1,495 Technology package, of much real use, it seemed a bit hit-and-miss and distracting to use whilst driving - never a good thing.



The 2.0 litre four cylinder 520d turbodiesel engine with 190 hp and 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm will be the mainstay of the range whatever spec and drivetrain level is chosen. Like all current engine options it is mated with an eight-speed sports automatic gearbox but it has a manual mode as well. With the xDrive option top speed is 144 mph and zero to 62 mph takes 7.6 seconds. The Combined Cycle fuel consumption is 60.1 mpg (62.8 mpg without xDrive) and CO2 emissions are 124 g/km (118 g/km without xDrive). During my week long driving spell with the 520d xDrive, mostly long journeys with ECO mode selected for open road and motorway cruising, the real-life overall figure was 42.9 mpg - well short of the official figure. As I value my driving licence too much to exceed speed limits, with the usual heavy traffic everywhere these days my driving mirrored what most other business drivers now experience.

The 124 g/km CO2 figure means that from 1 April the new VED costs are now £160 for the



First Year rate and £140 for the Standard rate thereafter, but as this model costs more than £40K add another £310 each year for five years to the £140 Standard rate cost. A non xDrive 520d version with M Sport spec has the same £160/£140 VED costs but it squeezes under the £40k price – but only just, providing no options are added. Company car drivers pay 26% Benefit-in-Kind tax from 1 April and non xDrive company car users will pay 25%.

Although there is a wide choice of engines with more to come, the 520d 2.0 litre 190 hp with 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm makes the most sense for most people and matched with its standard silky smooth changing eight-speed automatic gearbox it's a combination that suits all driving conditions from stop-start commuter runs to fast open road cruising. Whether the xDrive option is necessary is purely down to customer requirements, it certainly adds to the driving pleasure with more cornering grip and of course added traction during winter months.

It is certainly worth paying the extra £985 for the Variable Damper Control option which allows the driver to choose the Comfort suspension setting. This provides a more compliant and less fidgety ride over poorer road surfaces, especially with the M Sport lowered suspension and large 19-inch wheels with low profile tyres. The overall balance of the big saloon is more or less perfect with its lighter weight and 50/50 weight distribution

The latest version of the 2.0 litre 520d engine is a strong and refined performer whatever driving conditions are experienced. It's responsive and fuss-free in stop-start traffic with good acceleration once on the open road, where the legal maximum 70mph cruising speed is effortless and it is relatively fuel-efficient – but not up to the official Combined Cycle figure.

VERDICT

At no time did the engine sound or feel stressed and the relatively low CO2 emissions are less stressful when it comes to company car tax – and business executives make up the majority of 5 Series sales in the UK. The new 5 Series Saloon remains the benchmark range in the executive car market.



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For: Stylish good looks, enviable kerb appeal, impeccable build quality, high quality interior, lots of driving aids and connectivity equipment, well laid out controls, Variable Damper Control option improves the ride quality.

Against: Expensive to buy/lease, extra long term VED road tax cost in xDrive form as it exceeds the £40k limit, limited space for the passenger using the middle rear seat, real-life fuel consumption was well short of the official Combined Cycle figure.





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

BMW 5 Series 520d xDrive M Sport Saloon.

Price: £41,025 (£50,555 as tested).

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbodiesel, 190 hp, 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque, eight speed auto, xDrive 4WD.

Performance: 144 mph, 0-62 mph 7.6 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 60.1 mpg (42.9mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 124 g/km, VED First Year rate £160 and £140 standard rate thereafter + £310 each year for five years as this model costs over £40k, company car BIK tax 26%.

Insurance Group: 31E.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,935 mm (16.19 ft), W 1,868 mm (6.13 ft), H 1,479 mm (4.85 ft), boot 530 litres (18.72 cu.ft), four doors/four to five seats.