Latest BMW models news – plus revised 4 Series Coupé First Impressions

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Busy, Busy, Busy at BMW – Part of new model changes to 4 Series.

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) samples the latest Coupé

My email Inbox this week has been loaded with press releases about the latest changes to the 2017 BMW range of passenger cars. New is the most used word in the titles of these releases. In fact most of the amendments are for detailed styling changes, upgrades to equipment or the introduction of new levels of specification, sharper handling with steering and suspension changes for the 4 Series, and in some cases global adjustments to prices.

The announcement of all these changes coincided with the UK media launch of the refreshed BMW 4 Series range of Coupé, Gran Coupé and Convertible models. The 4 Series story started in 2013 with the launch of the Coupé which replaced the famous 3 Series Coupé, and since then the line-up has been extended with Gran Coupé and Convertible versions. The 3 Series has Saloon, GT Hatchback and Touring estate versions.



James Thompson, BMW UK's Product Operation Manager for medium cars, told journalists at the revised 4 Series media launch, "The UK market is the second largest in the world after the US for 4 Series sales. Around 23,000 units will be sold in its first full year of sales in this country. The four door Gran Coupé, because of the demand from corporate buyers, is the most popular body style with an expected 10,000 annual sales. Next are the two door

Coupé with 9,000 predicted sales, and the two door Convertible is expected to achieve around 4,000 registrations."

He added the introduction of the 4 Series has had little or no affect on UK sales of 3 Series models, with 26,000 3 Series Saloons being sold last year in addition to 11,000 Touring and 3,000 GT versions.

Prices for the revised 4 Series models start from £32,580 for the Coupé and Gran Coupé and rise through the range to £46,550. The Convertibles start from £37,630 and rise to £50,670. The high performance M4 Coupé is priced at £58,365 and the M4 Convertible at £62,460.

However James Thompson said that from July global prices will rise by an average 1.3% for 4 Series models and 1.6% as an average across the brand's entire range of all models.

Depending on the body style chosen the 4 Series mainstream engine line-up is petrol 420i 184 hp with rear and xDrive options, 430i 252 hp and 440i 326 hp. Turbodiesel units are 420d 190 hp and 430d 258 hp – both with rear wheel drive and xDrive options, and the 435d 313 hp unit with xDrive as standard. In addition there is the M4 six cylinder 3.0 litre 431 hp petrol unit. Depending on the engine and model chosen there is the option of six speed manual and eight speed Steptronic transmissions.

The 420d turbodiesel unit will be the most popular choice for all body styles, accounting for from 29% to 43% of sales. The xDrive option varies between 11% and 15%, and M4 sales between 16% and 17% of total 4 Series UK registrations.

When it comes to specification levels, in addition to the specific M variants, there are Sport and M Sport for the Coupé and Convertible and the Gran Coupé has an additional starter level of SE because of corporate sales. The previous Luxury level has been deleted. Three out of every four UK customers choose the M Sport specification.

Specification and styling changes include LED headlights, rear lights and fog lights as standard, Sport versions have new style front and rear bumpers and there is a range of new

styled alloy wheels and bodywork colours. Inside, leather upholstery is standard across the range, there is new detailed interior trim including metal finish carbon fibre inserts, all models have the sixth generation professional navigation system, real-time traffic information, including a function for inter-car connection with other new BMW warnings of traffic or road conditions ahead, and there is a new voice control information command system. All versions retain the Eco-Pro driving mode function with Eco, Comfort, Sport and Sport+ settings. The M4 versions also have minor styling changes outside and in, plus the option of an Exterior Carbon Package.

Most significantly all 4 Series models have revised suspension settings to improve handling but not compromising the ride comfort. There are new shock absorbers and anti-roll bars, and the power steering has been recalibrated as well.

The single best-selling 2017 model year 4 Series variant will be the 420d M Sport four door plus tailgate Gran Coupé, priced at £36,405, the same price as the two door plus tailgate 420d Coupé M Sport which is only marginally not the best selling version. The Gran Coupé has higher sales due to demand from business/corporate customers in the UK.

Unfortunately the 420d Gran Coupé was not available for testing at the media launch so I went with the two door 420d Coupé instead but with the by far the most popular M Sport spec.



The detailed styling changes inside and out are not obvious from a casual glance, but immediately noticeable just after a mile or so of driving on winding Cotswold country roads was the improved handling and ride compliancy. The changes to the suspension settings, with new dampers and roll bars plus the recalibrated steering, is a significant step forward and the A4 Coupe/Gran Coupé was good before. It is hard to put a value on such an improvement but it is certainly the most striking change for the 2017 model year cars.

The handling is taut, the steering needle-sharp and the ride comfort excellent, and that cannot always be said about sports BMW models. The latest 420d Coupé just felt so well balanced and a car you would really enjoy driving miles in, whether it’s on winding country roads or during more mundane motorway journeys. Normally it takes a while of driving for suspension and steering changes to become noticeable, but not with this revised range, the

improvements are felt immediately.

As for other changes in spec and trim, it's improvements all round, some more significant than others and the sat-nav, spec upgrades, iDrive infotainment and communication functions have all evolved just as with most other premium brand cars have as years of sales progress.

The 2.0 litre 420d 190 hp turbodiesel engine is well known and well liked and extensively used throughout the BMW range. With 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm response is strong, mid-range flexibility refined – even in Eco mode, and all done with little engine noise and no stress. My test car had the six speed manual gearbox which added to the 'sports' driving appeal of this rear wheel drive model. Top speed is 149 mph, zero to 62 mph takes 7.3 seconds, the Combined Cycle is 62.8 mpg and on my brief but swift test drive the 420d Coupe returned 50.4 mpg. With CO2 emissions of 119 g/km this M Sport spec variant will have VED road tax costs of £160 First Year rate and then £140 thereafter. Company car drivers will pay 25% Benefit-in-Kind tax. The insurance rating is likely to be the same Group 30E as before.

VERDICT

We expect new or upgraded models to be better than their predecessors, it's all about evolution. The latest BMW 4 Series Coupé does just that but with the added benefits of sharper handling and improved ride compliancy.

For: Classy and rewarding to drive, significantly enhanced handling and compliant ride comfort, latest in-car infotainment/connectivity technology, more standard higher grade specification.

Against: Not as practical as the four door Gran Coupé but it still costs the same, small price increase due from July.



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

2017 BMW 4 Series 420d M Sport Coupé.

Price: £36,405.

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder, turbodiesel, 190 hp, 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, six speed manual, rear wheel drive.

Performance: 149 mph, 0-62 mph 7.3 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 62.8 mpg (50.4 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 119 g/km, VED road tax £160/£140, BiK company car tax 25%.

Insurance Group: 30E tbc.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,640 mm (15.22 ft) , W 1,825 mm (5.99 ft), H 1,377 mm (4.52 ft), boot 455 litres (16.07 cu.ft), two doors/two seats.