Latest BMWs – including first drive impressions of the new Z4 Roadster

Published: July 19, 2019

Author: David Miles

Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/latest-bmws-including-first-drive-impressions-of-the-new-z4-roadster/

BMW NEW MODEL NEWS AND THE NEW Z4 ROADSTER TEST DRIVING VIEWS.

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) reports...

News

With the blockage of introducing new BMW and other premium brand German brand models now cleared with new or revised engines now fully homologated to meet the latest EU6.2 C and D Temp emission standards and the new WLTP fuel and CO2 figures obtained,

it's on with business to meet the backlog of existing orders and to bring in new ones.

BMW GB has just held a multi-model driving event for the UK's motoring media with a raft of updated models with new or revised engines as well as an opportunity to get behind the wheel of the all-new third generation Z4 Roadster two-seater sports soft-top.

Although not present at this week's media event BMW still have more all-new models to follow including the X6 sports SUV, the 8 Series Gran Coupe, 3 Series Touring estate, X1 compact SUV, 1 Series 5-door Hatch and more X2 mid-sized SUV variants. The introduction of PHEV petrol-electric plug-in hybrids is next on the agenda with around six new models on the road to the UK market in the next 12 months. The new 330e plug-in hybrid saloon arriving soon is expected to account for 25% of total 3 Series saloon sales in the UK. Electric power only mainstream models are also on their way as BMW expects to have 25 electrified models by 2023.

On the subject of PHEV plug-in hybrids Sara Delecia, BMW's UK product manager for medium cars said the company were surprised by, and hadn't been notified in advance of, the UK Governments plans to abolish the £3,500 plug-in vehicle grant which has caused sales to drop significantly. However she did say that PHEVs still offer significant advantages in lower running and tax costs.

But there is under-publicised better news from the Government. From April next year company car customers buying a new zero emission electric car will pay no Benefit-in-Kind tax (BiK). (Note: The following year it is scheduled to increase to 1%, and to 2% the year after that). The move is expected to stimulate sales of zero emission electric cars and of course BMW will have more pure electric powered models in their future line-up. The changes in BiK rates have been brought about by the implementation of the new and more accurate WLTP testing procedure and all petrol compliant models will also see their BiK tax rates fall by 2% from April next year. Business, fleet and retail customers also benefit now and for the foreseeable future with the £3,500 EV grant off the price of a new electric powered car.

The UK market for BMW new car sales is the fourth largest in the World for the brand behind the USA, Germany and China. Sales last year, due to the overall 6.83% fall in the new car market plus the delay in supplying re-homologated models, saw BMW sales fall by just 1.74% to 172,048 units, still more than Audi and just 190 units behind Mercedes-Benz. For the first six months of this year BMW UK sales were 90,021- a fall of 2.7% over the same period in 2018 with the new car market showing a fall of 3.41%. In the premium brand market sector this keeps BMW in front of Audi but still behind Mercedes-Benz.

The new BMW Z4 Roadster

This is the third generation of the BMW Z4 but this time it's a Roadster two-seater soft-top. No folding metal roof hard-top Coupé version is planned for this generation model line-up where prices range from £36,990 to £49,050.

There is the choice of Sport, M Sport and M Performance specification and performance levels. There is also a choice of three turbocharged petrol power units – the 20i 2.0 litre, four cylinder 197 hp, 320 Nm (236 lb.ft) engine, the 30i 2.0 litre four cylinder 258 hp, 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) unit and the M40i 3.0 litre, six cylinder 340 hp, 500 Nm (369 lb.ft) motor. Sport and M Sport spec levels are available for the 2.0 litre models and M Performance for the M40i. All models are classic rear wheel drive and the transmission is a standard-fit eight speed Steptronic Sport automatic gearbox, of course with the usual array of BMW driving modes.

Sara Delecia, BMW's UK product manager for medium sized cars, said at the media event this week, "… that with the introduction of the new Z4 with no Coupé version this time we were slightly worried on how that would affect sales. But we are very pleased to say that we have already sold over 1,200 units since orders opened in March this year and we expect to sell around 2,500 units in the UK annually throughout the seven-year lifecycle of this generation Z4".

She added that so far 55% of UK orders are for the 20i powered versions, 15% for the 30i and 30% for the M40i. The M Sport spec level is by far the most popular choice. Competitor

models are the Audi TT Roadster, Porsche Boxster and Mercedes SLC Convertible.

The new Z4 remains the classically styled low slung roadster with a long bonnet, set back driving position, two seats, long wheelbase with short front and rear overhangs, a soft-top plus a 50% larger boot with 281 litres (9.92 cu.ft) of luggage space whether the soft-top is open or closed. The fabric roof opens or closes in 10 seconds at speeds up to 31 mph. When down the roof is retracted out of sight so there is no restriction of rear view visibility.

This time the Z4 uses a version of the new 5 Series platform so it's roomier in all directions with a 50/50 weight balance between the front and rear wheels. It is 85 mm (3.35 in) longer at 4,324 mm (14.19 ft), 74 mm (2.91 in) wider at 1,864 mm (6.12 ft) and 13 mm (0.51 in) taller at 1,304 mm (4.28 ft). There is a 26 mm (1.02 in) shorter wheelbase at 2,470 mm (8.10 ft) which sharpens the cars agility but it has a 98 mm (3.86 in) wider track at the front and 57 mm (2.24 in) wider track at the rear – again for improved handling. The increase in

interior space is very noticeable with the two sports seats more centrally positioned, so increasing the elbow room between the occupants and the doors.

The new Z4 has a powerfully sculpted front apron with large air intakes, a low, broad BMW kidney grille and headlights positioned at the outer edges giving it a distinctive look so there is no mistaking the car from the front. The new-look mesh-design BMW kidney grille combines a sports honeycomb pattern with a three-dimensional structure. The headlight units are another first with the two light sources positioned one above the other for the first time.

The Z4 is equipped with LED headlights as standard, while the optional Adaptive LED headlights add a matrix function for the non-dazzling high beam and cornering lights.

The elongated bonnet with arrow-shaped contour lines directed at the kidney grille straddles the wheel arches in the “clamshell” style characteristic of classical sports cars. The joins at the bonnet’s sides merge into the flanks’ upper character sculptured panel line which runs back to the tail lights. A second character line emerges from the large air breathers behind the front wheel arches. The spoiler and the slender, horizontally arranged light assemblies in the brand’s customary L-shape help to give the tail of the new BMW Z4 a wide, sporty appearance. The most popular M Sport styling spec also includes prominent side sill skirts, a rear diffuser and 18-inch alloy wheels. The M40i has additional trapezoidal exhaust tailpipes and 19-inch alloys.

Specification is of course comprehensive but there are still plenty of extra cost options that will push the price up considerably. However as standard is BMW’s latest version of what we know as six generations of iDrive. Now we have what is called BMW Operating System 7.0 which offers touch, gesture, voice and the traditional iController ways of using all the many functions. Think of it as Alexa on wheels! It learns the owner’s voice tones and patterns, it remembers driver preferences; want to know the driving range of fuel in the tank or the oil level – just ask it! It’s an intelligent personal assistant say BMW, and it’s fully remotely updateable as even more functions are added in the future. This system is gradually being introduced throughout BMW’s entire range. All Z4 models get a pair of 10.25-inch digital screens, one for the instrument binnacle and the other for the central dashboard.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

BMW brought along to their media driving day just one example of the new Z4, it was the 30i with M Sport specification priced at £42,240. It might not be the most popular engine but BMW feel it is the ‘sweet-spot’ model in the range, the perfect combination of power, fuel economy, CO2 emissions and overall performance.

With 258 hp and a healthy 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque from 1,550 to 4,400 rpm this 2.0 litre four cylinder turbocharged petrol unit provides very broad and responsive power delivery so it proved ideal for pottering along country lanes at low speeds with plenty of ‘grunt’ to overtake slow traffic in a very short distance and also gave relaxed performance at higher cruising speeds. It is also remarkably quiet and smooth so I can see why it’s probably the best overall unit on offer, although it won’t be the most popular due to price. The model with the 20i 197 hp 320 Nm (236 lb.ft) engine and M Sport spec, the best seller, costs £38,740 which importantly doesn’t break the £40k price barrier which means it doesn’t incur the unfair £310 VED additional five years supplement on top of the Standard rate road tax cost.

The 30i model has a top speed restricted to 155 mph with a zero to 62 mph acceleration time of 5.4 seconds, plus a WLTP Combined Cycle fuel economy of 38.7 mpg and CO2 emissions of 138g/km. Unfortunately in real life my test drive, using country lanes and a short motorway blast, the real-life figure was 31.2 mpg, still reasonable given the performance and overall refinement. The VED road tax costs are £210 First Year rate then £145 Standard rate plus the £310 five years additional annual supplement as this model costs over £40k. Company car drivers, not many of those as it's mostly a retail user's car, will pay 31% Benefit-in-Kind tax. Insurance is Group 33 and warranty the usual three years and unlimited miles.

VERDICT

Overall the new BMW Z4 Roadster is good to look at, roomy inside, has improved boot space, high spec, impeccable interior quality, well balanced handling and very good ride comfort refinement; an excellent road to open-top classic and classy motoring.

For: Thoroughly modern but still a classically proportioned two seater Roadster, beautifully designed and laid out interior, roomier than past models with a larger boot not restricted for space when the fabric roof is down, compliant ride, well-balanced handling.

Against: No manual gearbox option, no hard-top Coupé version, more a sports cruiser than cut-and-thrust sports bruiser, 30i M Sport/M40i versions priced at over £40k incur five years of higher road tax costs.

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

BMW Z4 Roadster sDrive 30i M Sport.

Price: £42,240.

Engine/transmission: New 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbo petrol 258 hp, 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque, eight speed auto gearbox with classic sports car rear wheel drive.

Performance: 155 mph (restricted), 0–62 mph 5.4 seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle 38.7 mpg (31.2 mpg on my brief test drive).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 138 g/km, VED First Year road tax £210 then £145 Standard rate plus £310 supplement for five years as its costs over £40k, BiK company car tax 31%. Insurance Group: 33.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,324 mm (14.19 ft), W 1,864 mm (6.12 ft), H 1,304 mm (4.28 ft), wheelbase 2,470 mm (8.10 ft), boot space 281 litres (9.92 cu.ft), two doors/two seats.