

## BMW 3 Series

By Jim Mc Cauley

The BMW 3 Series is the compact luxury car that sets the standards for others so a new model carries a lot of responsibility for the company. It represents 20 per cent of all the cars sold by BMW and in the UK comfortably tops the German trio that also includes the Audi A4 and Mercedes-Benz C-Class.

Although the styling is a safe evolution from the previous model, the changes are subtle yet dramatic, penned by Christopher Weil as the result of an internal competition in the BMW Design Department.

Visually, it looks much more substantial than the few millimetres added all-round, with the headlights now extending to the edge of the kidney grille, and increased flaring of the wheelarches emphasising rear wheel drive. Double swage lines sculpt the side panels while a higher roof tops a greater glass area.

The range launches with a choice of four engines and the chosen vehicles at launch were one each from the petrol

and diesel options – the 320i petrol model and the 320d diesel. All engines are now twin-turbo and all feature the company's Efficient Dynamics technologies which contribute to improved economy.

The 320i is a 4-cylinder, 2.0 litre unit producing 245 hp and is available with either manual or automatic transmission. The test car featured the 8-speed automatic 'box with the option of manual override using the steering wheel mounted paddles. This combination records a 0-62 mph time of 6.1 seconds with its potential maximum speed limited to 155 mph. On-road, the solidity of the car impresses, adhering to the tarmac in all conditions and responding immediately to the lightest touch on the throttle. Steering is precise with superb turn-in as the auto box steps through or holds the targeted ratio as required.

Despite the performance, the car has a smooth and settled ride, and would lend itself to comfortable and long distance driving where stopping to fill up along the way would not be a problem with an official touring fuel consumption of 54.3 mpg (44 mpg combined).

But if economy is the pursuit of the 3 Series buyer, then the other model at launch was the 320d. Again available



with either manual or automatic transmission, it was the 6-speed manual version this time. The 2.0 litre diesel unit produces 184 hp and can reach 62 mph in 7.5 seconds with the potential to top 146 mph.

Ride is less settled in this model compared to the 328i, but interestingly both cars featured the optional adaptive M Sport suspension at £750, so no opportunity to compare this against the standard set-up. The weighting of the controls is well balanced in this car and like the 328i, the electric power steering provides better feel than expected.



Inside, the longer wheelbase provides more room for the rear seat passengers while the 480 litre boot is 20 litres bigger than that of the outgoing model. Standard in all cars is the iDrive controller which manages audio and navigation controls while three new trim levels add to the opening trims of ES and SE. These are a two-way choice between Sport and Modern at the same premium over the SE while a Luxury model takes the specification of the car to its highest level.

The 320d is listed at £29,080 and has a CO2 emissions of 120 gms/km for

annual car tax of £30. The official touring fuel consumption is given as 72.4 mpg while the combined figure is 61.4 mpg.

The 328i is listed at £30,060 with the automatic transmission adding £1,660. This model has a CO2 emissions of 149 gms/km, putting it in Band F for annual car tax of £130.