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'07 3 SERIES COUPE

EXCLUSIVE U.S. REVIEW

DOES THE **NEW**
TWO-DOOR
DELIVER **BMW'S**
ULTIMATE
DRIVER
PROMISE?





A TALE OF TWO THREES

3 SERIES COUPE GETS TURBOCHARGED

BY MIKE DUFF





tHERE ARE TWO SIDES TO this story. First, there is a coupe version of the latest 3 Series, arriving predictably after the sedan as the latest in a multi-sequel movie franchise. Then there is the subplot: The range-topping 335i coupe is the first BMW with a turbocharged engine in 20 years.

Of the two aspects to this story, BMW's return to forced induction is probably the headline. Having pioneered street-car turbocharging with the 1974 2002 turbo sedan, BMW gave up on it after the deeply unloved flagship 745i was dropped in 1986. Fitted with a turbo version of the company's 3.2-liter straight-six, the 745i was infamous for laggy power delivery and excessive thirst. Since then BMW hasn't been above dropping snuffy comments about those of its rivals who have resorted to forced induction to increase performance, so the 335i is a car with plenty to prove.

From a design standpoint, the 3 Series coupe looks pretty much as you would expect. The previous two generations of the *drei* coupe sold by the boatload, so BMW has wisely opted not to frighten the horses with anything too radical. That means a slightly wider stance than the sedan and similar front end styling—though if you look hard, you'll see the hood, headlamps and front fenders are unique to the coupe and the windshield angle is shallower. Xenon lights with BMW's "Corona light rings" are standard.

The roofline is lower than that of the sedan but higher than the previous-generation car, and the coupe is pretty much spared the "negative shape" Bangle-era design language, though a close look reveals some slightly concave surfaces lingering at the bottom of the door. The fat tail-lights look more Lexus than BMW.

Move inside the cabin and the coupe is immediately familiar to anyone who has crossed the threshold of its sedan sibling. The dashboard is identical, sharing common switch-gear and the same fiddly controls for the heating and ventilation system. Though the basic car does without, the debatable joys of iDrive will be an option in conjunction with satellite navigation.

Front seat occupants enjoy plenty of space, and there is a range of driving position adjustment to suit most any size pilot. The rear seat area is surprisingly spacious, too; access to the back is a little awkward, but anyone sent back there will enjoy reasonable legroom and headroom. The engineering team admits to looking at

the spacious Mazda RX-8, and it shows. Neat details include Mercedes SL-style seatbelt "feeder arms" to silently hand you your harness when the ignition gets switched on.

At this point, anticipation has built to such an extent that actually starting the engine (now by dashboard button rather than an old-fashioned twist of the key) is anticlimactic. The powerplant is eerily quiet at low revs, devoid of the bristly soundtrack you would expect from a BMW inline-six. Even blipping the throttle doesn't do much for the aural accompaniment, the turbochargers conspiring to stifle the induction and exhaust note.

That's right, *turbochargers*—plural. The 335i goes into the world with not one but two compact turbines. The low-inertia turbos work in parallel, each supplying compressed air to three cylinders, and are designed to eliminate turbo lag. In conjunction with gasoline direct injection, the net result is 300 hp at a relatively low 5800 rpm, accompanied by 300 lb-ft of torque all the way from 1400 to 5000 rpm.

On the move, the flat torque plateau quickly proves itself the 335i's defining characteristic. It does not feel particularly quick off the mark, but the engine's smooth manners shine through as it gathers momentum. Turn up the pace, and the engine responds in good humor, feeling more than capable of matching or beating BMW's official 0-to-60-mph time of 5.3 seconds with a manual, or 5.5 seconds with the smooth six-speed Steptronic auto (that's not much off the 4.8-second 0-to-62-mph time of the Euro-spec M3). The 335i enjoys more mid-range torque than its M-badged sister, and on the tight roads of the Austrian test route it proved phenomenal at passing slower traffic.

Even knowing the engine is turbocharged, it's near impossible to discern any hints. Turbo lag is not an issue, the motor pulls cleanly with as little as 1200 rpm showing, and throttle response feels instantaneous throughout the rev range.

And you'll search in vain for any aural clues: The 335i does without the water-rushing induction noise that tends to go with turbocharging, let alone uttering anything as crude as wastegate chatter. The only real giveaway is the engine's slight breathlessness at higher revs; there is little point in going beyond the 5800-rpm power peak. Toward the top of the rev range, the engine's natural soundtrack improves and some well-muted six-cylinder growl enters the cabin. It is an engine

2007 BMW 335i



2007 BMW 335i

ON SALE: September **BASE PRICE:** \$40,600 **POWERTRAIN:** 3.0-liter, 300-hp, 300-lb-ft I6; rwd, six-speed manual **CURB WEIGHT:** 3571 lbs **0 TO 60 MPH:** 5.3 seconds (mfr.)



we will become familiar with as it spreads throughout the lineup, starting with the new X5 later in the year.

Dynamically, the 335i is far from being the junior M3 many people expect. It's a sporty enough proposition for pretty much all of its core audience, but it's clear from the start the chassis is set up with comfort as the priority. On the generally smooth tarmac of

our test route in the Austrian Alps, the coupe wafted over everything the topography could throw at it—Michigan in the winter will be more of a challenge, but on first impressions it feels like a car that will keep its composure pretty much regardless.

Spring and damper rates are firmed up a bit from those of the sedan, but handling is pretty similar: strong resis-

tance to roll, excellent grip, and a neutral, adjustable balance. BMW claims opting for a turbocharged six-cylinder instead of a similar-output V8 saves 140 pounds in front end weight, sharpening those already glinting responses even more.

Okay, we do have one complaint. The 335i is being sent out into the world with no limited-slip differential, which doesn't really seem in keeping with the whole 300-hp-and-rear-drive thing. De-energizing the stability control for sport is largely an exercise in futility, as under hard

cornering the unloaded inside rear wheel starts to spin and smoke as that sizeable torque peak arrives. And on a related note, BMW is making xDrive four-wheel drive available as an option only on the entry-level 328i coupe; 335i owners will have to battle for winter traction.

The 335i's talents are so well-rounded as to make it pretty much spherical. It's good-looking, great to drive, surprisingly practical and blessed with a superb powertrain. Now the *really* interesting question: How much faster and firmer will next year's V8-powered M3 be? †