

LETTERS

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BMW NA AGREES TO FIX 335i TURBO PROGRAM

Editor's note: We began receiving a rash of letters all complaining about an alleged reprogramming of the program-management system in twin-turbo BMWs. Here are excerpts from some of those letters, along with BMW's commitment to solving the problem.—SC

I'd like to bring your attention to the ongoing issues surrounding the BMW 335i N54 twin-turbo engine. Last summer BMW introduced an ECU update for the N54 engine (v29.2) that was supposedly intended to fix issues with numerous problems, including reports of rattling wastegates on the turbochargers. However, what owners have been getting is far from an "upgrade" when being pushed to the v29.2 and later ECU updates. It appears that BMW's new ECU software, in an attempt to reduce stress on the turbochargers and remove problems with failing wastegates, is now opening the wastegates from idle. This change is immediately recognizable as a new symptom to the driver, never before experienced on the 335i: turbo lag. The turbochargers, due to the change in the wastegate duty cycle, appear not to engage until about 2,500–3,000 rpm. This is a far cry from the 1,400-rpm 300 foot-pound "kick" that 335i owners have come to love—and what's advertised by BMW....

Eric Z. Maass

My car has been impacted by a dealer update that was performed on my car in order to supposedly fix a TPMS light issue. After the update the car became a dog below 3,000 rpm, where it used to pull hard right from idle! I have called my dealer and BMW North America to complain, but I keep getting blown off and they just say, "Yes, we know we changed the car, but it's still within specifications." It's a real shame that my first and last BMW can effectively be neutered and made into a boring car and still be "within specifications," whatever those may be....

Jeff Callahan
West Chester, PA

I am a solo licensed driver at my local race track and I've been tracking for over a decade with all of my cars. I'm also an aerospace engineer and routinely maintain and build cars as a hobby. I am very sensitive about the way my cars operate, and I am very much in tune with all the mechanicals on with my vehicles. My car is a February '07 build picked up in Europe. The car came equipped with the

factory oil cooler. The car had pre-progman 29.2 when it was delivered, and I loved it. After a routine service visit and an update to the DME, I immediately noticed the exhaust sound to be louder even before getting in the car. As the mechanic was pulling my car out, I could distinctly notice a difference in sound. This is not a slight difference, but a very noticeable change. It is obviously louder because the wastegates are wide open.

On the road behavior was an even bigger shock. Before the DME update, the throttle response was very linear, smooth and immediate. The first thing I noticed post-DME-update was that the response was not immediate. Aside from all the internet mis-information, when I mash the throttle (in any gear) at low rpm (like 1,500 to 2,500) I feel a slight surge, then a rush of boosted power....

Joseph Change

I recently purchased a brand-new 2008 335i coupe. After much researching and BMW's claim that this is the first turbo car

with 0% turbo lag, I pulled the trigger. When I test-drove the car, the throttle response was terrific, and the turbo did in fact come on at 1,500 rpm. The first week was great, as BMW really produced a car that had no lag. After the second week the adaptive lights went out in the car. I took it into service, and they stated they needed to keep the car overnight to reprogram the electronics. When I got the car back I pulled out of the dealership and almost caused an accident, as the throttle response on the car had been changed and I had to put the pedal halfway to the floor. After countless calls to BMW NA and trips to the dealership they refuse to take any action, as their response is the car is responding as it should....

Anthony Vaccaro

I am writing this letter to get an idea if anyone else has contacted *Roundel* magazine to report turbo lag in any 335i cars. I test drove an '07 335xi coupe and ordered my '08 335xi—May manufacture, June delivery—



BUY ONE, SELL ONE, BUY ANOTHER... AND ANOTHER....

Satch, I thought you might get a kick out of these shots of our fleet. I purchased the 1980 320iS new in Rhode Island to replace a 1967 1600-2 that I bought for \$300 in 1974 with 90,000 on the clock. I eventually sold it in 1979 for \$300 with 180,000 on it—a little rusty in the rockers, but it served me well while I had it and was much more fuel-efficient than the '61 small-block Corvette I had in high school. (I bought the Corvette for \$1,000 in 1967 and sold it for \$1,200 in 1973 during the oil embargo; seemed like a reasonable price at the time, but I wish I still had it in my collection. It had the older-style front end with the stingray rear end, just like the one Buzz and Todd drove on the TV show *Route 66*.)

With three kids each one year apart, I promised to find them a nice older 3 Series if they worked and saved up half the money for it. With all the clean older 3 Series cars out here in the Bay Area, it wasn't too hard. The eldest daughter started with a 1985 528i which we found for \$3,000 with 135,000 on it—great driving car with blue leather interior and power everything. After three or four years we sold it and upgraded her to a 1989 one-owner 325iX and now to a one-owner 1994 318i.

The middle daughter still has the red 325is we got her seven years ago, which sits in the driveway awaiting her graduation from Wellesley College. I sold the 320iS to my son several years ago for \$1,000, and then turned in my company car for a one-owner 2000 540i M-Sport six-speed. Hence the four cars that now grace the driveway when everyone is home. They are now almost exactly seven years apart: 2000, 1994, 1987, and 1980.

Now if I can just get these kids off the family payroll and insurance policy....

Dave Solomon
Orinda, CA

right after I test-drove the demo, thinking I was going to get the same performance from my car as the one I test-drove. Boy, was I sadly mistaken. I have turbo lag—or should I say no power delivery until 3,000 rpm. The car I test-drove had power delivery at 1,400 rpm, just half a second after flooring the car. My car does not deliver turbo-induced power until well after 3,000 rpm....

Robert Hoosier

I'm writing to express my disappointment in what should be a great car. When I test-drove a 335i, I was impressed at how unturbo-like it felt—meaning no lag, good low-end grunt, like a big V8. I later tested an M3, then a 135i, and I found that the turbo engine had more than enough spirit for me. So I ordered my new 335i and took delivery of it in mid-July. The car is wonderful in every aspect, except what was a strong, torquey motor at low rpm became a typical lag-ridden turbo. Stomp on the gas and you get a few seconds to contemplate what is about to happen, which is whooosh! I don't want to contemplate things, I want my power-off idle, the way the car was marketed and the way the car performed at the beginning....

Gary Mazet

Most owners are aware of the fact that BMW updates vehicles' computer programs (or "progman versions," for *program management*) at regularly scheduled service visits. Small improvements are typically made with each new iteration, which fix small bugs and glitches in the operation of the vehicle. The recent update to N54-equipped vehicles, however, is anything but an improvement.

In response to repeated issues with noisy wastegate operation and poor fuel-pump reliability, BMW engineers chose the easy way out. Rather than recalling the vehicles to replace the impacted components with more robust ones, the latest progman versions (29.2, 30.1, and 30.2) instead are used to simply relax the wastegate duty cycles in hopes of preventing continued hardware failure. The implications of this measure are that any vehicle updated or built since March 2008 now faces drastically increased turbo lag before boost is built, accompanied by unruly and obnoxious exhaust noises, due to a significantly increased volume of spent gasses bypassing the turbos and exiting the car less muffled.

BMW's justification for building such an incredible vehicle utilizing a turbocharged engine was the comforting reinforcement to potential buyers that it did not perform like



AN ENTIRE FAMILY OF OKTOBERFEST MARAUDERS

I went home to visit my parents this past summer, and after my brother pulled into the driveway, I noticed a rare photo opportunity: my dad's '85 Cosmos Blau 635CSi with 160,000 miles, my dad's other '85 Diamantschwarz 635CSi with 185,000 miles, my mom's '90 green 735i with 225,000 miles, my brother's '89 black 535i with 130,000 miles, and my '98 Boston Green M3 with 68,000 miles. With over 768,000 miles among all of our cars, and no intention of getting rid of any of them, this is one family that can attest to the quality of these cars.

By the way, for any of you who have heard of a little thing called Oktoberfest and haven't gone: Get off your butt! You don't know what you're missing!

**Jonathan King
Dayton, OH**

PUT IT ON A LIFT—A FORK LIFT, THAT IS

Not too long after putting on those monstrous blue sway bars, you guessed it: The rear sway bar pretty much ripped those tabs off. My friend—still!—a true certified welder, agreed to weld it back for me. To facilitate the repair, we had to make do with what was available that early Saturday morning. I was assured that our "lift" is rated to safely carry the weight of my car many times over.



**Julio Culiati
Oak Ridge, TN**

a "typical" turbocharged car. Owners are now faced with power that does not build until past 3,000 rpm, despite previously having monstrous torque from only 1,200 (which is supported by BMW's claim of peak torque at 1,400 rpm)....

Jeffrey Callahan

Here is BMW NA's official statement on the turbo-lag issue:

In an effort to address specific noise concerns, BMW updated the turbocharged engine software on 335i/xi and 535i/xi models built from June 2006 through March 2008. The updated software causes a small amount of increased "turbocharger lag" under certain circumstances and, while not substantial, the lag may be perceptible to the most sensitive BMW drivers. X6, 135i, and 3 Series/5 Series vehicles from March 2008 production onward are not affected. **Release of the new software to restore the original turbocharger response is planned for January 2009**, and it will be available for vehicles produced from September 2007 through

March 2008 when they are brought to an authorized BMW center for a repair which requires a programming update. Clients with vehicles produced from June 2006 through September 2007 may request installation of the January 2009 software update. Clients who get this update should understand that there is a possibility of slightly increased engine noise levels under certain circumstances.—*Thomas J. Plucinsky, BMW NA*

IT'S THE MINI, NOT THE ONE

BMW is trying its best to convince us that the 1 Series has the spirit of the classic 2002. But it's not the One, it's the Mini. I've been into 2002s for a while and recently purchased an '04 Mini. Shortly after this purchase, I discovered that the Mini is everything the BMW CCA veterans talk about when they tell stories of the Club being started by 2002 owners back in the day.

Mini owners wave and smile when they pass each other on the road. There's a camaraderie with Mini owners that the 1 Series will never come close to. There will most