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NEW BMW 3 SERIES

**"Handles like a sports car,
rides like a limo"**

**EXCLUSIVE
IMAGE**



EXCLUSIVE IMAGES

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el of BMW's new 3 Series

next year, we hit the road in disguised prototype to see if it's as good to drive as previous models

the front and rear axle set-ups are also well matched and give a nice sense of symmetry, instilling confidence when you up the pace.

It's on the firmer side, especially on our car's 19-inch wheels, but the clever stroke-dependent technology definitely works. On the road, even over harsher surfaces and nasty cambers that could confuse some rivals' suspension set-ups, the 3 Series filtered out harshness without removing its trademark connection to the road surface.

It's not too severe a compromise to achieve the trademark response, because the damper tech means it rarely gets towards the end of its stroke – and when it does, those hydraulic bump stops reinforce the car's plush, controlled feel. It's fair to say it rides like a luxury car, but handles like a sports saloon should.

There are one or two drawbacks, though. While the chassis set-up is good, the steering doesn't have that





DETAILS

Reporter Carson (left) goes through technical side of all-new 3 Series with Integrated Application BMW Midsize Series engineer Mischa Bachmann at the brand's test centre in Nürburg



“Our 330i test car had plenty of power to exploit the benefits of the diff. Compared with its predecessor, there’s an extra 7bhp but an impressive 50Nm more torque from the 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol turbo”

much life to it. The weight is nice in Comfort mode, but in Sport it feels a bit artificial, while the shortage of feedback is something common to pretty much all electric power steering systems. It’s an issue van As knows about and an area he and his team are working to improve before the new 3 Series is signed off.

There are no complaints about the car’s nimbleness, however. Better understanding of the alloy and steel CLAR platform has resulted in extra stiffness around the suspension top mounts, without having to add any weight into the car’s structure, which combines with redesigned suspension geometry to improve the direct feeling you get from the chassis.

The differential helps to boost agility on the way into corners and through direction changes as well, while the electronic control software means traction out of bends is also good.

Our 330i test car had plenty of power to exploit the benefits of the differential, too. Compared with its predecessor, there’s an extra 7bhp but an impressive 50Nm more torque from the 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol turbo, so 256bhp and 400Nm in total. Thanks in part to the weight reduction, claimed fuel

consumption is also improved by five per cent, although efficiency figures have yet to be confirmed.

The eight-speed auto works as well as it does in the larger 5 Series, and the 3 takes plenty of inspiration from its big brother, not least inside.

Although our camouflaged prototype didn’t have production-standard materials, we got a good idea of the cabin layout. It’s very similar to the 5 Series, with a large touchscreen placed in a great position on top of the dashboard, similar controls and features on the transmission tunnel (including iDrive) and a new digital dash panel that offers more configurability and information.

There’ll also be autonomous tech that subtly evolves what’s on offer in the 5 Series, we’re told, while the 3 inherits some of its sibling’s executive qualities as our autobahn tests showed. The car’s high-speed refinement is a clear step on from the outgoing 3 Series, while it’s resolutely stable, too.

There’s more space in the rear than before and it definitely feels roomier. While final dimensions haven’t been confirmed, a look in the boot indicated that it’ll be sized competitively, too.



FINISH

Our car wasn’t trimmed in production-ready materials, but a multifunction steering wheel will come as standard



Q&A

JOS VAN AS

Head of application driving dynamics

DYNAMICS are a key area for the new 3 Series to get right. Jos van As and his team were tasked with achieving that aim. Here he explains how they did it.



Q What were the targets for the new 3 Series?

A "The 3 Series has to be the best-handling car in its class; our customers have a certain expectation. I told you this car feels like an 'old-school' BMW, so that's what we've tried to do: make it engaging and fun to drive. But improving the comfort alongside this was also an important point, while adding more assistance and safety systems as well as extra tech."

Q Where are the big advances in this seventh-generation car over its predecessor?

A "We understand the model's platform even better now, so our technical appreciation of the mechanical and electronic systems in the car is even greater. We've been able to understand how the structure, the suspension and everything works together. It means we've saved weight but gained rigidity, so we can improve the handling and performance as well as comfort and efficiency. The advances are everywhere."

Q How have new development tools helped to improve what you can deliver to the customer?

A "We've used some new, more powerful simulation tools so we can better map out how the car works together. It means we can push what's possible and develop things quicker."

Q How would you characterise this new seventh-generation BMW 3 Series?

A "More advanced than ever, but it's still a great driver's car, like a 3 Series should be. Its dynamics are core to the positioning of the model."

EXCLUSIVE IMAGE



AVAILABILITY

INSTRUMENTS

New digital dashboard offers more options to modify the information relayed to driver

INFOTAINMENT

Rotary iDrive dial on the transmission will help to control the infotainment touchscreen, which will be similar to that found in the larger 5 Series



Verdict

THE BMW 3 Series has long been the benchmark in this class for handling and dynamism. This new model promises to raise that bar even higher, yet at the same time a combination of clever chassis features, a higher-quality and more refined interior packed with more tech, and greater practicality will make it more comfortable and easier to live with. BMW's junior executive saloon is set to take yet another step in maturity and the signs are positive indeed.