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BMW 5 Series first drive: BMW 5 Series on the road

On paper, the new 5 retains the core values of the brand: near perfect 50:50 weight distribution and rear-wheel drive. But clothed in a bigger body, can it still produce the sparkling performance the brand has come to stand for?



New double wishbone front suspension improves ride performance

We were treated to a long drive through the Pyrenees to find out how the first two models to go on sale handle some pretty extreme roads.

All-aluminium diesel engine

First up was the 530d, a new all-aluminium straight-six 3.0-litre engine that pumps out 245bhp while returning a claimed [44.8mpg](#) and corporate driver company car tax friendly 166g/km CO2. Opt for the new eight speed auto gearbox, as fitted into

our test car, and emissions drop to 160g/km.

In spite of the impressive performance figures – 0-62mph is dispatched in 6.3 seconds – the 530d wasn't as inspiring to drive as you might expect. Left in auto mode, there was a slight delay between pressing down the accelerator and the car springing into action.

That said, the 530d is certainly no slouch, once you get the revs up there's plenty of power on tap and the performance delivery is smooth and sophisticated. And that six-cylinder engine has a deliciously throaty growl when revved hard. So provided you're not in need of rocketship performance, this diesel version should satisfy.

A combination of new double wishbone front suspension and a revised front axle smoothes out the ride, making the 530d's well-equipped cabin an exceptionally comfortable place to be. And the new electronic steering, introduced to reduce weight, proved as communicative and responsive as any other hydraulic BMW system.



Centre console slot for keyfob is a sensible touch

Petrol power is best

Next we were treated to a drive in the 535i SE, a turbocharged 3.0-litre version. Pressing the throttle to the floor produced a gorgeous snarl and a grin-inducing spurt of speed. Although this version is only 0.3 seconds faster than the 530d on paper, its 306bhp of output seems to kick in with much more urgency, and it positively encourages the driver to make good use of its power reserves.

Equipped with the eight-speed [auto box](#) and steering wheel mounted paddle gearshifts, it felt immediately like a classic sporting BMW. And thanks to the inclusion of optional Active Steering (which steers the rear wheels slightly to improve agility) and Dynamic Drive (which reduces body roll) it clung to the road with a vengeance. This latter piece of kit allows the driver to fine-tune the chassis by choosing from Normal, Comfort, Sport or Sport+ modes.

The penalty for all this pleasure is a wallet-bashing CO2 rating of 199g/km – road tax will cost a whopping £435 in the first year, then £235 afterwards, while fuel economy drops to a claimed 33.2mpg.

Eco-friendly model coming soon

If you require something a lot 'greener', you may decide to wait till July for the 520d. Expected to be the best-seller of the new range, in manual gearbox guise this 184bhp 1,995cc four-cylinder model emits a class-leading 132g/km CO2 and an official fuel consumption figure of 56.6mpg. Helping it achieve these impressively low figures is the EfficientDynamics suite of 'green' measures, including a stop-start engine system on the manual version. This is the only new 5 to have such technology.



535i combines single turbocharger technology with direct injection and variable valve timing

There will also be a 525d, with the same all-aluminium 3.0-litre unit as the 530d, but output of 204**bhp**, emissions of 162g/km and 45.6mpg.

At the other end of the scale is the scorching 550i petrol model, fitted with the twin turbocharged 4.4-litre V8 that boasts 407bhp and a 0-62mph time of 5 seconds flat. Emissions top 243g/km and mpg dips to 27.2.

If this is too rich a mix, there are also 523i and 528i petrol versions with less power but lower running costs.

Eight-speed auto option

All models except the 550i come with a six-speed manual box as standard, and the option of the new eight-speed auto transmission, which the 550i gets for free. Both of our test cars had the auto box, which we found fiddly at times to switch from Drive to Reverse and Park.

As well as the expected plethora of airbags and other safety kit that add up to a Euro NCAP rating of five stars, the new BMW can be specified with an optional head-up driver information display that projects vital information onto the windscreen - a very useful piece of kit.

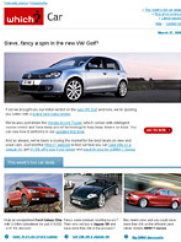
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