

BMW 320d



WE'VE ALWAYS HAD A SOFT spot for the 3-Series BMW – and its precursor, the 1600/2002. Despite five generations of the model to date, the same basic formula of a rear-wheel drive saloon (with a boot), driven by engines that give a generous output, has been maintained.

Of course, the years have spawned estate car, coupé and even convertible variants, but here we sample an amply powered diesel version.

There's an even more prodigious six-cylinder diesel, in fact, but this four-cylinder's 136bhp output is comfortably ahead of most two-litre alternatives – the Alfa Romeo's five-cylinder JTD is its only serious rival.

Four-pot diesels are prone to low-speed harshness and below 1500rpm, this BMW lacks real smoothness and zest. After that, it gets into its stride and revs willingly. Past 60mph cruising, a growl begins to surface again, so we don't rate its refinement on a par with the 156 JTD or its six-cylinder stablemate. Fuel economy is significantly better than both, however.

The other downside of this diesel 3-Series is that its suspension doesn't maintain the petrol models' impressive ride and handling qualities. Weightier steering and some loss of composure over lumpy, undulating roads left us disappointed.

For the rest, it's discreet luxury all the way. It still has fixed back seats, but they're really comfortable and the boot, though modest, is nicely lined. There's a little more legroom in the current version (it's been growing with every new generation), but headroom remains modest.



VERDICT

The BMW 3-Series is a Mondeo/Vectra-sized saloon, but clever marketing and controlled supply have ensured that the extra you pay from new will be returned with a bonus at trade-in time. Its reputation for reliability isn't quite as rosy as its image, but it's unarguably impeccably trimmed and finished, and attracts a lot of compliments from passengers. Like most more-expensive possessions, it's a pleasure to live with.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	★★★★○
Fuel economy	★★★○○
Controls/displays	★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★★○
Comfort	★★★★○
Space/practicality	★★★★○
Safety	★★★★○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1951cc 4 cylinder diesel. 136bhp at 4000rpm, 206 lb ft at 1750rpm. Belt-driven single overhead camshaft, 16 valves. Direct-injection diesel with turbo and intercooler

transmission 5-speed manual, rear-wheel drive. 29.1 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 22.9 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts. Coil springs. Rear: independent multilink with coil springs (with central arm axle)

steering hydraulic PAS - 3.3 turns lock-to-lock - 10.6m diameter turning circle between kerbs. (16.75m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with standard ABS and traction control

wheels/tyres 7in alloy with 205/55 R16W Goodyear Eagle NCT Touring. "Space-saver" spare

LIKES AND GRIPES

discrete security for boot contents
tray of tools still provided
quiet sunroof, even when going slowly
service indicator (works on car use)

high cost of options
"space-saver" spare
less nudge protection nowadays

THE 3-SERIES RANGE

body upper medium 4-door saloon, 2-door coupé and convertible, estate car
trim levels standard, SE

engines petrol 1.9/105bhp (316) 1.9/118bhp (318i), 2.5/170bhp (323i) 2.8/193bhp (328i). diesel 1.95/136bhp (320d), 2.9/184bhp (330d)

drive rear via 5-speed manual (4 speed automatic with torque converter on 316i and 318i; 5 speed Steptronic on all 6 cyl versions)

OVERTAKING ABILITY			
Extra bhp on paper shows on the road, especially through the gears; a bit doleful below 2000rpm, though less vibrant than some			
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear
20-40mph	3.0	11.8	No
30-50mph	4.0	7.5	13.5
40-60mph	4.9	6.8	9.5
50-70mph	5.5	7.2	9.3
30-70mph	9.5	14.7	22.8
max speed in each gear (*using 4600rpm for best acceleration)			
gear	①*	②*	③*
speed (mph)	26	46	74
		105	129

SAFETY			
Progressive and powerful brakes but promises even better injury prevention in a crash, with head and thorax air bags			
braking	dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with standard ABS)		
pedal feel	●●●●○	pedal load	distance
in emergency	●●●●○	10kg	32½
handbrake	●●○○○	17kg	24 best stop
		+4kg ie 21kg	25½m

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS - not tested				
front impact	pedestrian rating	〇〇〇〇	side impact	
overall	〇〇〇〇			

SECURITY FEATURES			
central locking	✓	alarm	✓
remote control	✓	immobiliser	✓
auto window closure	✓	luggage security	
deadlocks	✓		●●●●●
	✓ standard	〇 factory option	✗ not available

HANDLING AND STEERING	
Competent, safe by not so agile, with Mercedes-type sturdiness to steering as well - cause could be this heavier diesel	



COMFORT	
Ride mildly disappointing too but 318i felt smoother, more absorbent. Superb air con with stratified flow and general aura of quality/well-being	

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS	
Even better looking (in our view) with near accurate speedo, fine gearchange and easy clutch action. All seat controls smooth, too, with adequate fixed lumbar thrust	
type of use (air conditioning off)	AA test (mpg)
urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	31
suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	39½
motorway (70mph cruising)	49½
cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	51
rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	58
typical mpg overall	49½
realistic tank capacity/range	57 litres/620 miles
official mpg (urban/extrurban/combined)	38.2/60.1/49.6
CO ₂ emissions 152 g/km	car tax band B

HOW THE 320d COMPARES		engine cyl/cap/power (no/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes† best stop (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ (p)	overall length (cm)
BMW 320d		4/1951/136	2400	9.5	22.8/14.7	49½	24/17	112	98/74	3.3/10.6	447
Alfa Romeo 2.0 Twin Spark*		4/1970/155	3310	7.8	22.6/15.7	31	26/22	106	95/76	2.2/11.4	443
VW Passat 1.9 TDi		4/1896/110	2450	11.1	21.4/15.9	53	24½/18	110	102/74	2.8/10.9	468
Peugeot 406 2.0 HDi		4/1997/110	2400	12.0	23.1/15.6	48½	29/16	113	98/75	3.1/11.2	460
BMW 530d (auto)		6/2926/184	2040	8.2	Auto	35½	24/15	116	103/77	3.0/11.0	478
All 4-door saloons * petrol							† all with ABS			(p) all with PAS	