

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				★★★★○	
<i>Extra bhp on paper shows on the road, especially through the gears; a bit doleful below 2000rpm, though less vibrant than some</i>					
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*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	26	46	74	105	129

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★★○○				
<i>All the limitations of four doors with a boot, but very comfortable. Tight turning circle, but Touring easier to reverse. Several lined, rattle-free oddments spaces</i>				
<i>in centimetres (4-door saloon)</i>		inside	(† with sunroof)	
outside		front - legroom	86-112	
length	447	- headroom	90-97†	
width - inc mirrors	193	rear - typical leg/		
- mirrors folded	179	kneeroom	98/74	
height	142	- headroom	91	
load sill (inside/outside)	19/73	- hiproom	129	
steering		load space (litres/cu ft)		
turns lock-to-lock	3.3	(all seats in use)	396/14	
turning circle	10.6	load length	86	
easy to park/garage?		load width	91	
	★★★★○	load height	47	

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★★○				
<i>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</i>				
				

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/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering/ turns/ (p) circle (m)	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	

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

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

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

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★★○				
<i>Competent, safe by not so agile, with Mercedes-type staidness to steering as well - cause could be this heavier diesel</i>				
				
COMFORT ★★★★○				
<i>Ride mildly disappointing too but 318i felt smoother, more absorbent. Superb air con with stratified flow and general aura of quality/well-being</i>				

FUEL ECONOMY ★★★○○				
<i>Average by 2.0 litre standards, but extra power comes as a bonus. Good range enhanced by precise trip computer</i>				
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/extra urban/combined)	38.2/60.1/49.6			
CO ₂ emissions 152 g/km	car tax band B			