

# BEST WHEELS • OAKVILLE



## BMW X5



BMW strives to create a vehicle that's as at home carving pylons as it is bashing through snow drifts

By Malcolm Gunn  
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

Question: When is an SUV not an SUV? Well, according to BMW, the all-new X5 is, in reality, an SAV, which stands for Sport Activity Vehicle.

The BMW-invented SAV category probably has more to do with marketing than anything else. But for this German producer of exquisite, high-performance road machinery, any move to create a vehicle like the X5 that's at home on or off the beaten track is a step in completely uncharted territory.

Regardless of how you categorize the X5, BMW is acknowledging the phenomenal growth in the broad sport utility vehicle category, which today accounts for one in every six new vehicles sold in North America.

And the luxury SUV market, which includes products for the pampered such as the Lexus RX300 and LX470, Land Rover Discovery and Range Rover, Lincoln Navigator, Cadillac Escalade, plus a host of others, is gaining strength at an equally fast clip.

The X5 is constructed at BMW's Spartanburg, S.C. factory, which is already home to its Z3 series of sporty two-seaters.

The wagon-shaped X5 may be similar in wheelbase and other key dimensions to the luxury 5 Series sedan, but it's considerably taller, not to mention significantly heavier

(about 500 kilograms).

Although technically classed as a truck, the X5 has not been developed for heavy off-road use, but rather, to deliver performance-oriented driving on a wide variety of road surfaces.

The X5's sheetmetal sits atop a rigidly-designed unit body instead of the traditional truck-like ladder frame, and the drive system is of the all-wheel variety instead of the more traditional two-speed transfer case.

The X5's centre differential splits the front/rear torque on a 38/62 (per cent) basis during normal conditions, but can send 100 per cent of the power to the front or rear wheels if slippage is detected.

Powering the X5 is a 4.4-litre DOHC V8 with variable valve timing that produces 282 horsepower. This 32-valve motor is the same one used in the 5 Series sedan, and puts out identical power. BMW claims that the X5 will reach 60 mph from

a standing start in 7.5 seconds, a very decent number for most cars, but outstanding for a vehicle approaching a hefty 2,270 kilograms with a high centre of gravity.

Your only transmission choice on the X5 is a ZF-built five-speed automatic.

Towing is a no-sweat deal with the X5, which is rated to haul up to 2,700 kilograms.

The X5 combines its potent power with state-of-the-art luxury and high-tech wizardry, such as stability and hill descent control, liquid-cooled alternator, self-leveling rear air springs and optional rain-sensing windshield wipers to highlight just a few.

Order the available sport package and the feature list grows to include a more firmly-tuned suspension, eight-way powered front seats, special interior headliner, fender-filling 19-inch alloy wheels with performance-rated rubber and a special titanium-coloured grille.

The X5 also includes front seat head protection and side-impact airbags with rear-seat side-impact airbags optional.

The X5 is one safe and secure piece of rapid transportation that's ready to tackle just about anything at anytime.

It may not be some skid-plated go-anywhere mountain climber, but it is a highly-refined, highly-skilled, all-purpose trekker for those who crave at least as much sport as utility in their SUV (oops, SAV).

### 2000 BMW X5

- ★ Four-door all-wheel drive SUV.
- ★ 4.4-litre DOHC V8 producing 282 horsepower.
- ★ Five-speed automatic transmission.
- ★ Exceptional performance sets a new standard for SUVs.
- ★ Full complement of luxury, as well as advanced technical and safety features.
- ★ Spacious interior offers lots of room for people and cargo.
- ★ Towing capacity rivals almost anything on the road.
- ★ Base price: \$70,000

## Nissan Sentra ready to compete

(Continued from page C2)

should be sticking more to the speed limits.

Also part of the drive, was in the GXE which will probably be a good 40-50 per cent of sales. This car is targeted at those eyeing Corolla, Cavalier, Focus, and Protegé. With its Maxima-like looks, one expects size-relative performance and the GXE was quite up to the task.

I don't remember the interior of the last Sentra I drove (a 1998) as being anything but a lifeless mix of slate and gray plastics and cloth. While the GXE also continues in the gray-vein it is looking much more modern, especially the centre stack console for radio and heat/air controls. The seats, always a Nissan high point, were support-

ive and comfy even for someone of my girth.

The GXE also adds niceties like a cargo net and light in the trunk, heated outside mirrors (a Canadian must) and rear cup holders.

The arena Sentra has entered is the most hotly contested in Canada. According to Nissan marketing director Ian Forsyth, 206,000 compact cars were sold in Canada last year representing 17.4 per cent of the entire market in 1999. So you see why Nissan has brought Sentra back - if you are left out here you will be left behind.

But Nissan doesn't see this as a game of catch up, put an exercise in reasserting itself.

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