

2001 BMW 330Ci



The 2001 BMW 330Ci is the latest enhancement of what is generally considered to be the finest sports sedan in the world.

It's hard to believe that a new engine, actually an enhancement of a current engine, could have so much impact on one carmaker and on its future in North America.

But this isn't just any engine. It is the reaffirmation by BMW of the inline six-cylinder, the Holy Grail on which the entire company is based.

The new 3.0-litre engine is so special to BMW that it will be the basis of many cars coming to Canada and the U.S. over the next year.

It will be fitted to the 2001 330Ci Coupe that goes on sale in Canadian showrooms now. It will also be fitted to an all-wheel-drive 3-series sedan with mechanicals based on the X5 SUV. Called the 330ix, it requires a story on all its own and will be profiled separately in coming weeks. The 3.0-litre engine (also profiled separately) will also find its way into the X5 later in the year in a model called the X5 3.0 that will augment the current 4.4-litre V8 version of the potent sport ute with the twin kidney grille.

The 3.0 replaces the 328 models that will be discontinued. The 323 will remain unchanged with the current 2.5-litre version of an earlier in-

line six-cylinder generation. A 330 Sedan will follow later as will a 330 Cabrio.

The 3.0 will also be fitted to the Z3 Roadster and Z3 Coupe later in the year. There is also the M3 coming to Canada in the fall but it will have a model-specific 3.4-litre, in-line motor. The four-cylinder engines were quietly dropped last year and from now on, BMWs will all be fitted with a six-cylinder or better for North American buyers.

The 3.0-litre engine can trace its architecture back the M50 of two decades ago. A wonder then, it has been refined to the point that BMW engineers have come back to the conclusion that an in-line six offers the best harmonics and can run near vibration free without costly and heavy counterweights as required with V6 designs. BMW admitted they are still considering V6 concepts but their V-engines will remain confined to eight- and 12-cylinder models.

There is no question the 3-Series is the car all other makers use as a benchmark when they introduced their latest "European-inspired" sports sedan. But the 3-Series is the real McCoy and the people at BMW know it and relish the acclaim. It would be easy to say the new car is just the old

one with 200 more cubic centimetres, but that would be a false assumption. The 330Ci and its brethren are an entirely new development in the evolution of the overall car concept.

New Engine

The new engine is rated at 231 hp and 221 ft/lb of torque in Europe where 98 octane fuel is available. Here it will be closer to 225 hp and 212 ft/lb of torque on premium pump fuel. The standard gearbox for this front-engine, rear-drive is the old reliable five-speed from Getrag with its antler-shaped shift pattern. I have been driving Getrags for 25 years. They are sometimes a micro-second short on the shift speed, but they are immune to ham-handed drivers. Yet they have that intangible "Euro" feel to them.

That same "Euro" goes for the independent rear that is the newer multi-link style. Making multi-link rears work in a front drive is tough enough. But on a rear drive car with the loads and centrifugal forces presented when more than 200 lbs of torque are rammed home by the clutch results in independent suspension geometry equations that are an engineer's nightmare. But this is BMW where front-engine and rear-drive is more than just the way they do business, it's the essence on which the company is founded and has gone from strength to strength.

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