





BMW 1-Series M



# Slide & seek

There's only one way to find out if the new BMW 1-Series M deserves that exclusive suffix. Time to get sideways...

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**I**F THIS PAPER COULD EMIT smell, then the acrid fug of tyre smoke would be soaking your nostrils right now. The BMW 1-Series M Coupe arrives as it means to go on: fast, noisy, and lairy. They say that the internet is rewiring our neural pathways, and that our surfing/emailing/tweeting smartphone world is killing our collective concentration. Well here's a car to focus the mind in the old-fashioned way. Rear-wheel-drive set-up, twin-turbos, 335bhp, fat arches and a face only a mother could possibly love. Bring it on.

For a tricked-up 1-Series, an awful lot of us want to know how good this thing is. This is partly because the word is that the 1M is a proper old-school M machine, perhaps even the true successor to the legendary Eighties E30 M3. With its back-to-basics ethos in mind, I'm pleased to confirm that it feels right the moment you get into it. The cabin layout is beautifully simple, if a little sparse for your 40 grand. There's some orange-piped Alcantara on the doors and dash, and various chunky M touch-points (wheel, gearlever). You sit a little high perhaps, but it's otherwise very much the business. Just get on with it you fool, it seems to be saying. OK.

Slot the key into the recess to the left of the steering wheel, prod the start/stop button and savour a sound that'll centrally heat the cockles of any long-time BMW fan's heart:

the sweet beat that only six Munich-originated cylinders can supply. That and the metallic rasp from the quad exhaust. It's a great combo, and one of the best signatures in the car world. It's good to have it back, too.

Fast-forward to the first corner. All the meaty goodness of a proper BMW M car is right here: it's fast – obviously – and feels super stiff. But it's the balance of its controls that's so engaging; the interplay between clutch, 'box and throttle being one of the things that BMW built its reputation on. (I remember the first one I did serious mileage in – an '85 E30 323i – and the 1M's gearlever fits the hand in a way that parachutes me straight back to those heady days. Except the linkage is better now.) Fourth, third, second, tickling the accelerator each time inbetween for a little shot of noise. There are quicker shift actions out there, even if the 1M has a shorter-throw, but there's something satisfyingly engineered about it. It's also refreshing to be driving a fast car that needs hands and feet to do the work, rather than just tapping away at a pair of flappy paddles. Essentially, the 1M puts you in command in a way that's increasingly rare these days.

Then it's sideways, obviously. Sideways like its wheels are on castors. What with all its new-fangled 'efficient dynamics' messaging, you could have been forgiven for thinking that BMW is somehow ashamed of its mastery of chassis engineering. My old 323i was an absolute animal, a car with no ABS, no power

steering and for which traction control and electronic-brake distribution were distant electronic voodoo. (It was acceptable in the Eighties.) The new 1M has more weaponry at its disposal than the British Army, but it also has a big 'off' button sandwiched in the middle of the air vents on the top of the dashboard. So you prod that one as well, thankfully spared the messy business of rummaging around in the iDrive's nether regions.

Stocky car, light weight (well, relatively light, by modern standards anyway – 1,497kg), powerful engine, terrific rear-drive chassis, second-gear hairpin with perfect forward visibility... why can't all cars be like this? Aim, point, fire. Balancing this thing on the steering and throttle is pretty much the crack cocaine of the car world. In order to get the brilliant images you see on these pages, I'm forced to do it repeatedly, but I don't expect any sympathy. At some point in the process, and with the tyres now stickier than Sticky the stick insect, this definitely starts to feel like the most unashamedly 'mad-fer-it' M car since the original. (It also needs to be released: the stability control system is a bit over-zealous for my liking, though it would no doubt be a different story in the wet.)

Actually, the other BMW the 1M reminds me of is 1998's M Coupe, the slightly daft but very entertaining Z3-based bread van that some engineers apparently cooked up as a weekend project (and possibly a practical joke). That car's

“IT'S REFRESHING TO DRIVE  
A FAST CAR THAT NEEDS  
HANDS AND FEET TO DO THE  
WORK, NOT FLAPPY PADDLES”



Ride is firm on the  
19in Michelins, but  
not spine-crushing



Diff-cooler hangs  
very low. Beware  
speed bumps



## BMW 1-Series M



Well laid-out cabin  
feels a bit sparse  
for your £40k









# “THE FACT IS, FEW THINGS IN LIFE ARE AS FUN AS A PROPERLY SORTED FRONT-ENGINE, REAR-DRIVE CAR”

rear suspension was almost Victorian, so its handling was officially ‘interesting’. The 1M is dynamite by comparison. It has masses of grip, but with 335bhp to play with you can effectively choose your angle of departure before you’ve even left your front room. No less a driving god than Jenson Button recently had a pop at *TG* for being obsessed with all this sideways malarkey, but the fact is, few things in life are as much fun as a properly sorted front-engined, rear-drive car on a familiar road. And this one is the bollocks, frankly.

So how have they done it? By going back to first principles? Not really. In fact, if this is effectively the true new M3, it might have pulled this trick off by borrowing a fair bit of the current V8 M3. (Is that cheating? Does it matter?) Most of the key chassis hardware, for example. The front suspension and five-link rear axle – made almost entirely of aluminium – are M3-sourced, as is the variable M diff which will lock up 100 per cent *in extremis*. The brakes are seriously beefy for a car this size: they’re perforated steel discs of 360mm diameter at the front, 350mm at the rear. There’s also the MDM (M Dynamic Mode) software, which tweaks the engine into turbo nutter mode, but the 1M does without the M3’s adaptive EDC damping set-up.

The engine itself isn’t new, either. Previously ensconced under the elongated bonnet of the Z4, it’s still a state-of-the-art unit; a 3.0-litre twin-turbocharged straight six, with direct injection and double VANOS variable valve timing. What this all adds up to is an M-car package – in contrast to the most recent M3,

M5 and M6 generation – that doesn’t need to be revved to the edge of insanity to do its thing.

In fact, the numbers are very good: 335bhp at 5,900rpm, 332lb ft of torque from 1,500rpm to 4,500rpm. And it’s this part of the 1M’s character that gives it the real-world edge over the M3, especially on the traffic-clogged roads of the south-east where we tested it. In standard mode, it has a canyon-like mid-range, and that’s a very 2011 attribute. The 1M is limited to 155mph, but makes 62mph in 4.9 seconds. But forget all that: the really impressive stuff happens in-gear, in the mid-range where you really feel the benefit.

Confession time. The truth is that while the 1M is perfectly happy to hooligan about the place, it’s the width of its ability that ends up most seducing you. The ride seems firm to begin with, but actually the 1M can take serious punishment without you, or it, complaining. And maybe all that ‘efficient dynamics’ propaganda is actually starting to sink in, too. BMW’s optimum shift indicator is also to blame here; it’s a discreet little up or down arrow at the bottom of the main gauge display, and once you know it’s there it’s difficult not to be chided into changing up at the first possible opportunity. The upshot is that the 1M will pull happily from almost nothing in sixth gear. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are 224g/km, which is fair enough for this sort of performance. Claimed fuel economy is 29.4mpg, but a day of rampage knocked more than 10mpg off that. Also not too bad, given that a Focus RS struggles to deliver that in mixed driving. ➤

**BMW 1-Series M**

*Dull to look at, but fun to thrash. 335bhp = slidey*

*Alcantara helps it feel like the sportiest 1-Series*



The drive home, through the Essex badlands and into the gorgeous countryside in the north of that most misunderstood of British counties, is more of an eye-opener than the day's earlier silliness. Because of its size and extrovert overall character, the 1M probably does inherit the original M3's mantle, and deservedly so. But it's also a crucial pointer for the future direction of BMW's performance division. The next M3 and M5 will both feature forced induction, partly for environmental reasons but also because it's the path to greater

flexibility. Sustainable performance, in fact. On this evidence, they'll be all the better for it. Is the 1M better than the current M3? It's easier to enjoy, that's for sure. At £40,020 (before options, naturally, and you'll want the upgraded sound system for a start), it's also usefully cheaper, if still a bit pricey for a small BMW. It's a tough little car, this, but not such a hooligan at heart after all. By looking backwards for inspiration, BMW has simultaneously vaulted forwards. And sideways. 📺

“THE DRIVE THROUGH THE ESSEX BADLANDS AND INTO THE GORGEOUS COUNTRYSIDE IS AN EYE-OPENER”



**SPECIFICATION: BMW 1-Series M**  
**Price** £40,020 **Engine** 2979cc 6cyl, 335bhp, 29.4mpg  
**Performance** 0-62mph in 4.9secs **Maximum speed** 155mph  
**Transmission** six-speed manual, front-engined, RWD **Weight** 1,497kg

## EMMY AWARD-WINNERS

**Is the M mystique all down to the cylinders?**



WE HAD A SNEAKING SUSPICION AT its launch that the current M3 was an end-of-an-era car. An M3? With a V8 engine? Didn't seem right, somehow.

Not that it's a bad engine, or anything like a bad car. God, no. The Competition Pack M3, with the M-DCT transmission, is a rabidly high-performance car, and also benefits from improvements BMW made to its steering. So it turns properly too, and feels less artificial than the first iteration.

But the doubts persist. Especially as – like the V10 in the previous M5 – the M3's V8 is a very high-revving unit. It's fun, but a bit counter-intuitive. Tellingly, the brilliant hyper-priced GTS limited edition addressed these issues: at last, an M3 that lets you ride a fat mid-range torque curve, all the better to exploit what is a truly world-class chassis.

The 1M uses a straight-six and automatically feels more... M-ish. And indeed more-ish. Less is more-ish, in fact. Funny that, even if the original M3 was a rather thin-sounding four-pot, so much of the M mythology is locked into the number of cylinders and the noise the thing makes.

The next M3 is a twin-turbo six; the imminent M5, a twin-turbo V8. The balance of the Force has been restored.

