



The new 4-cylinder engine in the 2013 BMW 328i is available as a standard six-speed manual or new eight-speed automatic with steering-wheel-mounted shifter paddles.

By Steve Schaefer

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The BMW 3 Series has become so identified with its role as “the” sports sedan (or coupe or wagon) that it defines the segment. Automotive buff magazines rate the car in their top-ten favorite lists, year after year.

To redesign the sixth-generation car, which came out as a 2012 model, BMW made it slightly larger and a bit more fuel efficient. The sedan now stretches 3.66 inches longer and has a wider track (1.46 inches front, 1.85 inches rear). And the car looks bigger now, too, thanks to horizontal body lines and tricks like linking the flattened twin-kidney grille to the headlamp pods with a chrome bridge. Despite its grander dimensions, the new car weighs almost 100 pounds less than the old one.

To make the 3 Series more fuel efficient, BMW again offers a four-cylinder engine, after many years of selling only the inline six. This latest model uses Twin-Power Turbo technology to get 240 horsepower and 260 lb.-ft. of torque out of just 2.0 liters of displacement in the 328i. The entry 320i model offers 180 horsepower from the same displacement. With a 5.7-second zero-to-sixty time, the four in the 328i is no slouch. It just sounds less like the BMWs we’re accustomed to.

I recently drove a 2013 328i for a week. With the four-cylinder engine, you can choose the standard six-speed manual or a remarkable new eight-speed automatic. The manual, in my opinion, is more fun, but here in the United States, the automatic is king. Eight gears allow some precise and efficient gear selection. For an extra \$500, the Sport version of the eight-speed provides handsome steering wheel paddles for racecar style quick shifts. My tester had that Sport version.

Order an xDrive model if you want your 3 Series with all-wheel-drive traction. Or, opt for a convertible for a refreshing open-air experience.

The EPA awards the four-cylinder 328i with automatic an average of 26 miles per gallon (23 City, 33 Highway). In my Alpine White test car, I achieved 25.7 mpg; that essentially matches the EPA, for a change. The manual-equipped car gives up one mile per gallon in the city but gains it back on the highway, earning the same 26 mpg. The Green numbers are pretty good, at 7 for Greenhouse Gas and a 6 or an 8 for Smog.

Driving a 3 Series is always a joy, even on the freeway, but hours of commute traffic make it feel like it's all cooped up. I took it onto a favorite back road and it stretched out and ran. The carefully tuned independent suspension provides quick reflexes and sufficient comfort, while the floating-caliper disc brakes on all four wheels stop the car in a hurry. As a BMW, it flaunts an ideal 50/50 front/rear balance, and it uses rear-wheel drive — a fairly rare but highly touted platform for a sports sedan.

You can customize your experience using the Driving Dynamics Control to select one of four settings. Besides “normal,” choose the Sport or Sport + setting. Or, set it to ECO PRO and the car will tailor the throttle mapping to burn less fuel. My tester actually shut down at lights to save gas — an unexpected sensation.

BMW Powers 3 Series by Four Once More

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~~BMW Group has announced that it will be introducing a new 3 Series model, the BMW 3 Series Active Tourer, in the second half of 2013. The new model will be based on the BMW 3 Series platform and will offer a range of engine options, including a new 1.6-liter engine. The BMW 3 Series Active Tourer will be available in a range of colors and will feature a variety of optional equipment, including a sunroof and alloy wheels. The new model is expected to be a popular choice for customers looking for a practical and stylish 3 Series car.~~