

# Lots of sport, lots of utility (though decidedly not an SUV)

By Joe Sage

You may notice the M badge at the top of the facing page, but the absence of M in the otherwise lengthy model name above. This is not an actual M car. The M badge is just part of a package—a fistful of options—a perhaps misleading trend among several German brands now. Options are a big part of how we feel about this sporty wagon—and not really in a good way. At fifty grand, it has no backup camera, no keyless entry, no navigation, no satellite radio, no heated seats. Those cost many thousands more (see sidebar) and are carefully grouped to force you to buy more than you seek. But hey—first, let's drive.

A diesel powertrain, with its inherently higher torque, can generally beat the pants off its gasoline counterpart. We expected that here, but were disappointed on our first punch. The logbook notes that acceleration “goes from nothing to whiplash. Not noteworthy whiplash, just all the whiplash it's got.” Turbo lag in this day and age? A look at the 328d specs shows 181 hp, 280 lb-ft of torque, and a painful zero-to-60 time of 7.7 seconds. The gasoline 328i (240 hp and 255 lb-ft) does the run in just 6 seconds. (A Volkswagen Golf GTD does it in 5.6 seconds, with 135 hp but 380 lb-ft of torque.)

We had started out straight away in the car's Sport+ mode, based on lessons learned in a recent 4 Series. But as that resets itself to normal after each stop, we noticed it didn't really affect much. We wish for a chance to try the car with a manual transmission. Manumatic shift may help some.

This apparent conservation of power serves the diesel wagon in other ways, though—it is rated an impressive 43 MPG highway, with a

*The BMW wagon, redone in 2012, is attractively styled. We continue to notice details—for example, the brushed metal eyelids on the headlights, looking especially sharp against this blue paint—just one more highlight of many that catch our eye over a week's time. Features have a good balance now, extra little nuggets you discover bit by bit—not simple or boring, but not as overwrought as the brand was for much of the past decade.*



## SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE...2.0L 4-cyl TwinPower Turbo Diesel  
 TRANSMISSION.....8-speed sport automatic  
 DRIVETRAIN.....xDrive all-wheel-drive  
 POWER/TORQUE.....181 hp / 280 lb-ft  
 BRAKES.....ventilated disk 13/11.8 front/rear  
 WEIGHT.....3790 lb  
 MPG.....31/43/35 (city/hwy/comb)  
 RANGE.....525 miles

BASE PRICE.....\$42,950

INCLUDED: Universal garage door opener, auto-dim mirrors, power front seats, split fold rear seat, storage package, automatic climate, ambiance lighting, assist eCall and TeleServices, Bluetooth/USB.

ESTORIL BLUE PAINT:.....550

BLACK "SENSATEC" INTERIOR:.....incl

M SPORT PACKAGE: 18-in wheels 400M A/S tires, sport seats, highlight trim finishers, aluminum hexagon interior trim, M steering wheel, aero kit, shadowline exterior trim, anthracite headliner.....3850

DYNAMIC HANDLING PACKAGE: Adaptive M suspension, variable sport steering.....1000

DESTINATION CHARGE:.....925

TOTAL.....\$49,275

### PACKAGES NOT INCLUDED ON THIS CAR:

LEATHER INTERIOR:.....1450

COLD WEATHER PKG: (incl heat seats)\*.....950

LIGHTING PACKAGE:.....900

TECH PACKAGE: (incl nav)\*.....3150

DRIVER ASST PKG: (incl rear camera)\*.....950

DRIVER ASST PLUS:.....1900

PREMIUM PKG: (incl keyless entry and satellite radio)\*.....2200

TOTAL w/essential packages\*.....\$56,525

TOTAL w/all packages.....\$60,775

### OPTIONS NOT INCLUDED ON THIS CAR:

18" WHEELS:.....600

CONVENIENCE OPTIONS (8 TOTAL).....6300

HARMAN KARDON SURROUND SOUND\*\*.....875

SAFETY OPTIONS (3 TOTAL).....1400

TOTAL w/essential pkg/opts\*\*.....\$57,400

TOTAL w/all pkg/options.....\$69,950

range of 525 miles per tank—a great road tripper.

The wagon drew plenty of praise based on its style and pretty blue paint (\$550 was apparently well spent on the eye-catching Estoril Blue finish). The car seemingly exudes utility, too. Though not tall like a crossover, and though its all-wheel xDrive is not apparent to the uninformed observer, a number of people inquired whether this was some sort of new crossover from BMW.

The 3 Series Sports Wagon actually does deliver considerable utility. With significant cargo capacity—17.5 cu.ft. with all seats up, or up to 53 cu.ft. with seats folded—we used this compact, low-slung, road-handling car for a number of cargo runs around town, and were amazed at its ability to gobble up volumes of goods that might have otherwise been small pickup loads.

During the week, we were annoyed by the lack of aforementioned keyless entry (who needs just keyless start, if you can't get in with your hands full?), backup camera and so on. But what must be even more annoying would be making the actual purchase of this vehicle. Features seem diabolically separated to force more purchases than really

needed—not a new trick, but never welcome and in this case very pricey (see sidebar).

It's no longer hard to get full features at any price point. If BMW wants to compete with, say, a \$16,000 Kia, they really need to be a little more willing to include more at their prices. This was a nice car in a lot of ways, but we would be averse to topping 50 grand (and approaching 60) just to have a backup camera, keyless entry, heated seats and satellite radio. Being enticed up to the full \$70k level is almost unimaginable, unless you are in a brand trance. (A fully optioned actual M3 sedan, on the other hand, tops out at \$87,550.)

Despite annoyances due to missing features—and the alarming costs this revealed to us—we enjoyed our week with the BMW 328d wagon. It could be peppier, but as we got used to it, its driving appeal increased. Its handling was tops, and though we didn't really utilize it, it still has xDrive up its sleeve—which could be combined with its high fuel mileage and long range for some great winter trips. Wagons have become rare, anyway. So if the high cost-to-features ratio (and its cunning nature) fazes you not, this is worth a look. ■

- These hot metal door pulls curve into your living space enough to often bump your leg on—or to burn it on.
- Our logbook included turn signals that would cancel themselves while sitting at a light, and a tailgate that opened itself overnight (with a full load exposed).
- The car had surprising levels of cargo volume and utility.

