



LIFE MAGAZINES

MONTHLY A5 LOCAL LIFESTYLE MAGAZINES

MOTORING - **Magnificent M Power**

BMW have been producing M (for Motorsport) versions of their road cars since 1978. It's a simple idea – take a big executive saloon, stick a very powerful engine in it, beef up the brakes, suspension and steering and add a couple of discreet spoilers and a nice badge. The result is massive performance, huge luxury and plenty of practicality wrapped up in a discreet package.

All the Ms were restricted to 155mph but take off the limiter and they'll outrun a Porsche, yet they're astonishingly cheap to buy. Here's my pick of the bunch.

E46 M3 Coupé or Convertible (2000 to 2005)

To my eye the prettiest of the 3 Series, the last generation M3 is a beast of a car. Squeezing 343bhp out of a normally aspirated 3.3 litre straight six, it will scream to 62mph in 4.5 seconds and on to a (delimited) 185. With nothing more sophisticated than a limited slip diff reining in all that power it still handles like a dream and provides the most fun you can have with your trousers on. It's also spacious, practical and supremely well built. You can get a good one for £11k – staggering value.

For: Good looks, massive performance, a driver's delight.

Against: No 4 door version available.

E34 M5 Saloon or Touring (1991 to 1995)

A venerable old warrior of a car, this elderly version of the 5 series combines rugged good looks and modest luxury with the kind of grunty performance that still cuts the mustard today. The 3.8 litre straight six kicked out 335bhp through the rear wheels delivering 62mph in 5.9 seconds and an unrestricted 174mph. Electronic driver aids were considered effeminate back then so, if you enjoy lurid power slides, this is the car for you. The price you will have to pay for all this magnificence?...Five Grand!!

For: Incredible value, space and comfort, wild but predictable handling.

Against: Getting a bit long in the tooth now.

E39 M5 Saloon (1999-2003)

When it was launched, this version of the 5 Series was widely considered the finest executive saloon car in the world: refined, luxurious, handsome and dynamically excellent. The addition of a 400bhp 5.0 litre V8 and some suspension and drivetrain improvements served to make the M5 truly perfect. In terms of raw performance it was as quick as the M3 yet the only visual differences from the standard car were bigger alloys and a discreet badge on the tail; a true Q car. You can pick them up for ten grand but if you want a truly pristine example you're looking at £12k. I think you can manage that.

For: Absolutely everything I can think of.

Against: They didn't make an estate version.

M635 CSI Coupé 1983-1989)

This car is a true modern classic; in the 1980s you could expect to see these things hammering around the race tracks of Europe. The ruler straight styling and shark nose front end endowed it with brutally handsome good looks. The 3.5 litre straight six was tuned to deliver 286bhp, serious power for the time and the 6.4 second 0-60 time and 150+ top whack were none too shabby either. It's a classic car so they're thin on the ground and you have to expect to pay classic prices. I found one for £9k but a mint example would be quite a bit more.

For: Good looks, spacious, fun to drive, classic status.

Against: Expensive, hard to find a good one, driving experience from an earlier age.

Kit Johnson