History moves with us

Special
Mobile Tradition live
Facts and background

2004 brings with it a very special anniversary: 75 Years of BMW Automobiles. Few car manufacturers can look back on a more diverse and exciting past than that of the Bayerische Motoren Werke. From the simplest driving machines to top-flight sports cars, from small delivery vans to luxury saloons with 12-cylinder engines – in the course of these 75 years BMW has offered virtually every form of mobility on four wheels. The latest models of the new 6 Series, the X range and the forthcoming 1 Series ensure that this history also points firmly into the future.

75 Years of BMW Automobiles
1929 – 2004

Looking back on the history of BMW car production and its major milestones.

Marking the start of an exciting 75-year history: the BMW 3/15 PS.
Dear Friends of the BMW Group,

In 1929 the first BMW four-wheeler was built at a hired assembly plant. It was a small car that met the personal transport needs of broad segments of society. In 2004, 75 years on, BMW is about to launch another innovative, compact car in the shape of the BMW Z4. In the intervening seven-and-a-half decades, the Bayerische Motoren Werke have turned out more or less every type of automobile that has ever appeared in the marketplace, from the microwar of the economic miracle years and legendary sports cars whose elegant lines still excite car aficionados, all the way to luxury limousines driven by large, powerful engines. In BMW car production, the attribute “sporty” has been writ large from the very beginnings: the company’s path has traditionally led from production car to sports car and from sports car to production car.

The creative freedom of the engineers who repeatedly came up with and drove forward new concepts even if they didn’t appear to suit the market, and the determination of the company leaders to stay on course even through difficult times, have made BMW one of the world’s most renowned and reputable car manufacturers. Among the ranks of BMW’s products are many of the most famous and beautiful cars of all times. Our task is not only to preserve and cultivate this heritage, but also to use occasions such as this anniversary to vividly convey the continuity as well as the disruptions and upheavals of the past. A number of brand-new photographs have been taken to reflect the theme of 75 Years of BMW Automobiles, most of which can be seen in this special issue. The beginning of this success story is described in a new publication entitled From Vision to Success. The Development History of BMW Automobiles 1918 – 1932. There will be many opportunities at many venues for you to join us in celebrating 75 Years of BMW Automobiles in suitable fashion.

Happy reading!

Holger Lapp

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This year marks the 75th anniversary of BMW series car development and production. As such, the Bayerische Motoren Werke do not belong to the pioneers of motoring history, as many believe, but they do rank among the most fascinating car manufacturers in the world.

 Barely another motor company can look back on a more exciting and multifaceted past. From the simplest of driving machines to top-flight sports cars, from small pickup vehicles to luxury limousines – over 75 years BMW has offered the motoring world virtually every category and class of four-wheeled mobility. BMW did not begin its serial car production until 1929. It was a time of straitened economic circumstances, and seen from today such a move seems both bold and visionary. Indeed, there were many sceptics who would have liked to put a lid on this “escapade” as soon as the first BMW model series had been launched. Many other such ventures were doomed to failure.

But in just ten years, during the decade leading up to the Second World War, BMW managed the 0 to 100 km/h dash, as it were, in record time. By the end of this short period of time, which had begun with a small car of distinctly fragile appearance, the company had turned out legends like the BMW 327 Coupé and the 328 racing model, which have since evolved into cars that countless enthusiasts today can only dream of.

After 1945, BMW had to start from scratch once more. It had lost its entire car manufacturing facilities, and its core designers had scattered to the four winds or been killed in the war. Yet the company’s revival proved sensational. A plethora of high-calibre cars alongside ingeniously simple vehicles such as the Isetta were to leave their stamp on the era of the economic miracle before BMW found its way back to its intrinsic style in the early 1960s.

The rest is a remarkable, frequently breathtaking story of success, a veritable explosion of new models, technologies and ideas that has reached its current zenith today. The fascination of this story is not so much the fact that BMW has survived at all, but rather the highs and lows that invite comparisons between the history of the BMW company and a human destiny. BMW has always been sports-minded, has fought against superior opponents in the competitive arena and the marketplace, has had to suffer defeats, but has always found a way of surviving and ultimately turning its dreams and visions into reality. BMW has always had a talent for building cars that stir the emotions.

The world has never before witnessed a broader or higher-quality range of cars than today, and never has the enthusiasm of the motoring world for BMW been greater, as mounting sales figures have regularly demonstrated for years. It has to be something very special that makes those cars with the blue and white emblem among the most desirable in the world...

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Holger Lapp, Leiter BMW Group Mobile Tradition
1929 to 1939: the first ten years

The history of BMW car production began with the BMW 3/15 PS, which marked its debut in 1929. In the decade that followed, BMW not only secured an increasing share of the market thanks to this car, but also steadily gained new customer groups with its ever-larger and more exclusive models. The high point of this development would be the unforgettable BMW 328.

by Walter Ziechnere

Historical records show that the first BMW car, a small Type 3/15 PS saloon featuring a modern all-steel body, rolled out of the factory in Berlin on 22nd March 1929. Yet long before this, cars had been a subject of discussion within the company. Documents going back to the year 1918 – when BMW was exclusively an engine manufacturer – contain entries indicating that an experimental vehicle must have existed at the time, all trace of which has been lost, however. Soon afterwards, BMW began providing engine units for four-wheeled vehicles.

The first images of a test model then appear in the year 1926, when BMW designers Max Friz and Gottfried Dünwächter were officially commissioned with designing various prototypes for a series production model. A range of cars took shape on the drawing board – models with four and eight-cylinder engines, as well as a handful of prototypes which were taken out for test drives.

18 horsepower and 100 kilometres and hour

At the same time, BMW recognized that an affordable, quality small car would have good sales prospects. A short time later, at the end of 1928, the Eisenach car factory – which produced just 15 PS saloons in 1927 – was approached by Walter Zeichner, the then Chairman of the Board of the company, with a view to producing a small car with sporting flair and a certain exclusivity, despite what appears from our present-day perspective to have been a modest output of 30 horsepower.

The T 3/20 PS, built in Munich, had a markedly more generous interior. Preparations were made to relaunch the car with a four-cylinder engine derived from the BMW 3/20 PS, at a not inconsiderable savings of 400 reichsmarks compared with the more powerful version.

Barring minor detail improvements, the new bodywork with the famous kidney grille was retained until 1937. In 1935, for example, customers could choose between models with a 1.5 or 1.9-litre six-cylinder engine. Generating 34 and 45 horsepower respectively, these now gave a top speed of around 100 km/h, which was ample for the time since only rarely did road conditions allow for such speeds while keeping within relatively safe limits. Beyond that, BMW buyers could choose from a wide range of bodywork variants, such as a saloon, convertible-saloon, convertible or two-seater sports convertible. Those in search of true exclusivity could simply order a chassis and have a special body of their choice mounted on it by a coachbuilding company. Such personalization – inconceivable today – was widespread in the 1930s, and numerous coachbuilders such as Gläser in Dresden, Baur near Stuttgart and Drauz in Heilbronn ran flourishing businesses.

BMW 328 – the legend

Needless to say there was also a new BMW sports car. The BMW 315/1 launched in 1934 weighed just 750 kilograms and generated 34 horsepower, barely enough for the car to reach the 80 km/h mark.

In the year 1936 the BMW 328 made its first appearance at the Berlin Motor Show. At 189 kilograms lighter than the previous model, the new car offered 90 horsepower and a top speed of 230 km/h, making it the fastest production car in the world at the time.

BMW’s new two-litre sports car, the 328, by contrast, had a much smaller production run but enjoyed far greater popularity and fame. It was none other than BMW motorcycle world record-holder Ernst Henne who presented the new lightweight roadster with its 80 hp engine at the Nürburgring on 14th June 1936, going on to win the two-litre class before a delighted crowd. From spring of 1937, this sports car was also available to any private customers who could muster the 7,400 reichsmarks it cost. Marked the start of a racing success story unrivalled in its class. There was barely a race involving the BMW 328 that was not won by one of these two-seaters, generally appearing in white racing livery and with trademark leather straps lashed across the bonnet. But it was a clear apogee of BMW’s automotive history. BMW ultimately took overall victory in the 1940 Mile Miglia – a sensational success that remains unfortold to this day.

Shortly before the Second World War, the BMW 335 came onto the scene – the last car model for the time being to be produced by the company. It was available in saloon and convertible variants with bodywork based on the 326, though driven by a 3.5-litre in-line six-cylinder engine. Generating 90 horsepower, this car managed over 140 km/h on Germany’s newly built autobahns. No more than around 400 models were completed before the production of cars for civilian use was halted on account of the war.

BMW 328 PS on the road 1936. Brochure for the 50 bhp, four-door, five-seater saloon 326 (left) and the BMW logo showing a BMW 320 PS (right) on its letterhead.

The BMW 328 sports car at the start of the Hohenzollern-Rennen 1937.

The BMW 303 came on the market at just the right time, for political changes were giving the economy a much-needed boost and encouraging the production of more cars. BMW quickly cast off its image of the small-car producer. Based on its experiences with the new BMW 303, a number of attractive new models appeared in quick succession, moving steadily up the hierarchy of car categories. But it didn’t mean that motorists on a more modest budget were forgotten: as of February 1934, the new model was also available with the four-cylinder engine derived from the BMW 3/20 PS, at a not inconsiderable savings of 400 reichsmarks compared with the more powerful version.

The BMW 328 sports car at the start of the Hohenzollern-Rennen 1937.

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This model signalled the relatively late start of car production at the Bayerische Motoren Werke. Times were difficult, but the small BMW was a success – by 1932, more than 15,000 units of the BMW 3/15 PS had been sold.

Still popularly known as the “Dixi”, this small car with the official model designation BMW 3/15 PS DA 2 (Deutsche Ausführung – German version No. 2) was the first production car to be built by the Bayerische Motoren Werke. After BMW had made an exceptional name for itself in aero-engine production from 1917 and in motorcycle production from 1923, it was high time at the end of the economically straitened 1920s to build the first car to bear the reputable blue and white emblem.

After various experiments and trials with prototypes built in Munich, it was decided in 1928 to build an already existent and highly promising model under licence. The choice eventually fell on the Dixi 3/15 PS small car built in Eisenach. This was itself a licensed model – a faithful copy of the Austin Seven manufactured in England since 1922. It was a small, simple vehicle with a four-cylinder engine and looked like a genuine car. The famous Model T Ford had served as inspiration for this Austin model. At great expense BMW took over the plant where it was built, the Eisenach car factory, which was part of the Gothaer Waggonfabrik AG, and set about turning the Dixi into a new small car that would display the BMW logo.

As time was of the essence – other manufacturers were putting new small cars onto the market – efforts were largely focused on creating an entirely new body. At the time, Germany was witnessing the appearance of the first all-steel bodies using modern production methods and built for several companies at the large AMBI-BUDD
Profile BMW 3/15 PS

body plant in Berlin. The first BMW would also be endowed with a superstructure of this kind.

Modelled on the small Rosengart car from France, which was yet another model built under Austin licence, a new all-steel body was developed. As the production site for this first BMW saloon, BMW rented a factory building from AMBI-BUDD in Berlin. By March 1929 the first BMW 315 PS DA 2 models were rolling out of this facility near the old Berlin-Johannisthal airfield, to be stored for later distribution to BMW dealers. It wasn’t until 9th July 1929 that BMW presented its first car to the public. A high-profile launch ceremony in the new BMW showroom in the centre of Berlin and a full-page announcement in the press alerted the public to the new car. A short time later, production of a tourer version began in the Eisenach factory, though it still featured the conventional steel/wood body construction with leatherette covering. By spring of 1930, BMW had expanded its range of small cars by further variants such as a two-seater Sport model, a two or four-seater convertible and what was known as the “express delivery vehicle”. About a year later it was joined by the 18 horsepower “Wartburg” sports car model along with a coupé version. Within a remarkably short space of time, BMW had a wide range of small cars up and running that met the most diverse customer requirements. In 1931, the DA 4 series even allowed for technically revised models, though the new swing axle threw up a few problems which had to be swiftly rectified. By the time production of this first BMW model series ceased in spring of 1932, almost 16,000 buyers had opted for the small BMW. BMW had thus defied the doubts concerning its “automotive venture” to establish itself from the start as a car manufacturer with serious credentials and one which – unlike many another newcomer in those years – had promising prospects of survival.

BMW 3/15 PS

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<th>Output</th>
<th>Transmission</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Brakes</th>
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Nürburgring – Nordschleife, 14th June 1936, rain: “Henne coaxed an awesome performance out of his new two-litre. What incredible acceleration! He’s off like a missile, down the long straight and into the twists and turns of the Ring ... this sports car is proving faster than all its supercharged rivals! With overwhelming superiority Henne crosses the line as winner ...” (Motorwelt commentary)

The designers, mechanics and constructors in BMW’s Munich development department had had a limited amount of time and money to create this sports car. They had to restrict themselves to the essentials, and perhaps it was here that the secret of this car’s success was to be found. Within a short space of time, the BMW 328 would dominate its class in an unprecedented...
The BMW 328 set the hearts of car fans racing the moment it appeared on the roads. Its elongated bonnet secured with heavy leather straps, its elegant lines and its rejection of anything superfluous make it the epitome of the sports car.

One of the secrets of the new BMW two-litre sports car was systematic lightweight construction.

The production model tipped the scales at little more than 800 kilograms, which, coupled with its 80 horsepower engine, made for an unrivalled power/weight ratio, ensuring rapid acceleration and a top speed of up to 150 km/h. At production launch in 1937, the lightweight roadster was one of the fastest German cars next to the powerful Mercedes supercharged models.

There followed the special versions with Superleggera bodies. Here the 328 swapped its everyday outfit for a tailor-made suit from Italy when a handful of beautiful and successful ultra-lightweight models were built. Pacesetters in automotive design of their day, they are now historical motoring gems of inestimable value. These cars would cross the Alps under their own steam in adventurous circumstances to take part in the “Gran Premio delle 1000 Miglia”, the toughest car race in the world.

A total of 464 BMW 328 models were built between April 1936 and September 1939. By 1940, they had taken part in 172 national and international events. The final tally: 141 wins, including legendary achievements such as overall victory and the team trophy in the 1940 Mille Miglia. After the war, this run of success was to be continued for many years, albeit under other names.

Right up until 1958, sports cars were being created that owed their appeal not least to the engine of the BMW 328 – even names like Veritas, Bristol and Frazer-Nash had, and still have, connoisseurs pricking up their ears on that account. Anyone privileged to drive a BMW 328 today is experiencing motoring history in one of its most sensuous manifestations.

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**BMW 328**

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Engine</td>
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<td>Output</td>
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<td>Brakes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
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<td>Top speed</td>
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1939 to 1954: hard times

At the end of the Second World War, BMW appeared to face insurmountable difficulties. The production facilities in Munich were largely in ruins and the BMW car factory in Eisenach had been confiscated and was now under Soviet administration. It would be 1952 before BMW was able to return to car production. The legendary “Baroque Angels” – models 501 and 502 – eventually paved the way for the company’s revival and became a symbol of Germany’s economic miracle.

by Walter Zeichner

Although car production in Germany came to a standstill between 1939 and 1945 to allow for the manufacture of war matériel, BMW received special permission to continue producing cars on a small scale until 1942 for the German authorities. Alongside this, the development of new models was clandestinely pursued in anticipation of peacetime, which it was hoped would soon come. Thus at BMW’s main plant in Munich, plans, drawings and prototypes for new cars based on the 328, 326 and 335 models emerged. All these drafts revealed a noticeably streamlined design and clearly reflected the influence of trends in automotive styling in the USA.

In 1946, with a staff of just a few hundred, the company began producing items such as cooking pots and hardware made of aluminium as a stopgap, with a handful of lightweight bicycles to follow. When the authorities finally gave the go-ahead for a scaled-down production of motorized vehicles, BMW was able to unveil its first new motorcycle, the R 24 with a 250 cc four-stroke engine, in December 1948, about six months after the currency reform. Hopes slowly began to emerge of one day being able to return to building cars again.

After initial experiments on a very modest scale with small cars, which rarely extended beyond the drawing board, thoughts turned to BMW’s reputation for building sporty, elegant cars, and it was decided to continue that tradition. On the technical basis of the pre-war 326 model, plans and drawings emerged for a new BMW with four doors, a classic six-cylinder engine and a new look, curvaceous body. BMW unveiled its secret model at the first Frankfurt Motor Show in 1951, presenting an as yet unfinished prototype of the 501 model. This big black saloon stood alone on the BMW stand, an impressive symbol of the fact that, despite the most adverse conditions and considerably later than all other surviving German car manufacturers, BMW had made an astonishing comeback.

But it would be the end of 1952 before the first customers were able to take delivery of their new BMW. In Munich, where previously only aero-engines and motorcycles had been manufactured, BMW had to build a new car plant from scratch, and crucial production equipment could not as yet be acquired. This meant that during the initial phase, car bodies were built by the Baur company outside Stuttgart and sent to Munich to be fitted onto the cars. Building each car in those days involved a great deal of time-consuming and expensive manual labour, and it quickly became clear that BMW would not make any profit from this model. Nor was the time really ripe for a car of this size. Most people were using bicycles (with motor assistance), motorcycles or laboriously repaired pre-war car models. Those in a position to buy a new car were few and far between. With a price tag of over 15,000 deutschmarks, the big new BMW was clearly well beyond the pockets of ordinary mortals.

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1951: the BMW 501 premiers at the Frankfurt Motor Show.
The BMW 335, which had its premiere in London in 1938, was the most powerful BMW of the pre-war era, its 90 horsepower engine satisfying the highest demands.

By the late 1930s, BMW had become one of Germany’s most famous automobile manufacturers. Within just ten years they had managed to evolve from the producers of a simple small car under licence to an automotive manufacturer that offered discerning customers a wide range of sporty car models. After BMW had joined the ranks of luxury car makers with its 327 Sport Convertible, soon to be followed by an elegant coupé version, all that was missing from the portfolio of BMW cars from Eisenach was a large, prestige saloon.

At the turn of 1937/38, it was decided not to produce such a car from scratch but to base the design closely on the four-door 326 model. At the same time, the automotive design department under the management of Fritz Fiedler was relocated from Eisenach to Munich. To draw a clear line between the new status car and the optically very similar BMW 326, the decision was made to build a new six-cylinder in-line engine with a displacement capacity of 3.5 litres. When completed in 1938, the unit showed few similarities with the previous engines in terms of its design. The spark plugs were differently positioned, the cooling system had been improved and...
The BMW 502, sibling of the 501 that still leaned heavily on pre-war engineering, introduced a true innovation in the form of the first light-alloy V8 volume-production engine in motoring history. With this unit, the BMW 502 was clearly targeted at the upper reaches of society and reflected the company’s aspiration to return to the leading ranks of car manufacturers.

With its BMW 501 model launched in 1951, the company had impressively stepped out of the shadow of the post-war years of privation, by which it had been particularly hard hit. Yet the new car’s powerful appearance could not disguise the fact that, at least in its engineering, this was no all-new product. It wasn’t until 1954 that BMW unveiled a genuine innovation in the shape of its sibling, the 502. One crucial innovation was a completely new engine, hitherto unseen in Germany. It was a light-alloy V8 unit with a 2.6-litre displacement and an output of 100 bhp. Following comprehensive preliminary studies beginning in the early 1950s, a first test engine was already undergoing trials on the test stand in March 1952, long before the series-production launch of the six-cylinder 501.

By mid-1954 the first production engines were being turned out. The powerplant with its twin carburettor easily produced an output of 100 bhp, and in trials with four carburettors it delivered 150 bhp. With this V8 engine, BMW presented the first post-war German unit of its kind. Worldwide it was a light-alloy V8 unit with a 2.6-litre displacement and an output of 100 bhp. Following comprehensive preliminary studies beginning in the early 1950s, a first test engine was already undergoing trials on the test stand in March 1952, long before the series-production launch of the six-cylinder 501.

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Stuttgart. With a price tag well in excess of 20,000 deutschmarks, such dreams were fulfilled by very few. But even sales of the saloon did not come up to expectations. More and more variations on the 502 theme, with different engines and various equipment levels, were produced, and even the model designations experienced three significant changes within six years.

The BMW 502 3.2 Litre became the BMW 3.2 and ultimately the BMW 3200. At its highest performance level, the engine driving the 1961 3200 S generated 160 bhp, making the car the fastest saloon in Germany with a top speed of 190 km/h. It even left plenty of sports cars trailing. But the days of the big BMW saloons were numbered. By 1958, production of the 501 six-cylinder model was phased out, and 1963 saw the end of the V8 saloon as well. BMW had long been successful in selling modern medium-range cars, and the era of the “dinosaurs” was over. Yet even though these models never held out the hope of much profit, BMW had continued to build them. As a symbol of the brand’s strength in being able to offer extraordinary products in difficult times, they maintained BMW’s prestige at a high level even through the small car era.

The BMW 502 and 502 had very high specifications, though it largely shunned 1950s fashion trends. The BMW 502 with its innovative V8-cylinder light-alloy engine reflected BMW’s aim to join the ranks of the most exclusive post-war carmakers. Was the first example with an engine block and cylinder heads made of light alloy. To endow this prestigious drive unit with a suitable “housing”, the body of the BMW 501 was lent a more exclusive appearance. Additional headlamps mounted in the wings and a striking chrome strip below the windows clearly indicated that BMW was moving towards the top end of German car manufacturing with this model. Quality materials and fine wood applications in the interior also bore witness to BMW’s aspiration to create a car for society’s elite. On the bootlid, a large eight embedded in a “V” proudly proclaimed the singular status of this model 502.

Buyers wishing to acquire the car and propel it along the as yet empty autobahns at up to 160 km/h had to part with 17,800 deutschmarks. A steering column shift and an ivory-coloured steering wheel were a concession to the prevailing zeitgeist, but beyond that BMW avoided any form of fashionable attributes. Just a year later, an even more powerful car was to follow. A 3.2-litre engine now provided for an output of 120 bhp, and the car cost a mere fifty marks more than the first V8, which had also come down considerably in price. At the same time, customers with highly individual requirements could order special hand-built models in the shape of a coupé or a two or four-door convertible. These collectors’ items were only available on commission from the renowned coachbuilders Baur near Stuttgart. With a price tag well in excess of 20,000 deutschmarks, such dreams were fulfilled by very few. But even sales of the saloon did not come up to expectations. More and more variations on the 502 theme, with different engines and various equipment levels, were produced, and even the model designations experienced three significant changes within six years.

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<table>
<thead>
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<th>BMW 502</th>
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<td>No. of units</td>
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<td>74 x 75 mm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Output</td>
<td>100 bhp at 4,800 rpm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmission</td>
<td>four-speed column shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brakes</td>
<td>hydraulic inner shoe brakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>model-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>2,580 cc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top speed</td>
<td>160 km/h</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1954 to 1972: on the offensive

Despite the difficulties and financial challenges the hugely appealing BMW 501 brought in its wake, the year 1954 saw BMW embark on a concerted offensive that remains unrivalled in the history of German car manufacturing after 1945. Even as the company struggled with the problems that arose during production of the BMW 501, BMW’s designers were working on an engine never before seen in the world. Inspired by the example of America’s V8 power plants, BMW produced its own eight-cylinder V-shaped engine made of light alloy, its displacement capacity of 2.6 litres generating an output of 100 horsepower.

Beginning in 1954, it was mounted in the 501, which remained largely unaltered but featured more luxurious specifications to become the 502, the precursor of a generation of very different, upmarket cars sporting the blue and white emblem. Principally with the aim of competing in the expanding export market for sporty, high-class cars abroad, the BMW 502 series was launched in the same year. Not until the early 1960s with the introduction of the New Class did a systematic, modern product policy emerge.

While the BMW 700 (shown left in a 1950s advertisement) was still a typical “economy miracle” car, the BMW 1800 of the New Class (right) promised “More power. More driving pleasure. More safety” – attributes associated with BMW cars to this day.

“...das ist mein Wagen!” ran the caption of this Isetta photo of 1955.

Sketch of the BMW 507 from a sales brochure.
BMW 507

The design classic.

The BMW 507 Roadster ranks among the most significant and valuable cars in design history. From its inception, it was regarded as one of the most beautiful cars of all time. With a production run of just 251, it was a short route from rarity to coveted classic.

The years following 1945 proved more dramatic for BMW in Munich than for any other of Germany’s major car manufacturers. The entire car production plant in Eisenach was under Soviet control and as such irretrievably lost. There could be no thought of building motorcycles, let alone aero-engines, in Munich for the foreseeable future. The stopgap production of items such as cooking pots, hardware, agricultural implements and a handful of bicycles signalled a modest revival. But when the first motorcycle – based on a pre-war model – was proudly unveiled at the end of 1948, thoughts began to turn to new cars as well. Yet despite several attempts, it was not a timely small car that would be the first post-war production model to sport the blue and white company logo.

At the Frankfurt International Motor Show in the autumn of 1951, BMW took the wraps off a large black saloon with a strikingly curvaceous body: it was the BMW 501, soon dubbed the “Baroque Angel” for its sweeping curves. A massive box-type frame and a six-cylinder engine with detail improvements compared with the pre-war power unit of the 326 made this an imposing car, but not a modern or even typically dynamic BMW model. At the same time, however, attempts were made to design a V8 engine which leaned heavily on contemporary American designs but was constructed of light alloy in a world first for volume production engines. This 100 horsepower engine debuted in 1954 under the bonnet of the BMW 502, and at the same time there was talk of creating a large sports car. Under the management of racing designer Ernst Loof, a first up-and-running prototype emerged. The bodywork lines were considered too conservative, however, and it was rejected. On the suggestion of luxury car importer Max Hoffman in the USA, BMW was persuaded to engage New York-based industrial designer and Raymond Loewy pupil Albrecht Graf Goertz. He duly delivered sketches for a ravishing roadster. The first bodies were
The BMW Isetta, a development of an Italian concept, became one of the most successful vehicles of the small car boom of the 1950s. The quirky design of this “bubble car” attracted a large following, and even today the sight of the Isetta sparks affectionate comments. It was the cuddly car for an entire generation.

Eventually hand-built of sheet aluminium beaten over a wooden form. By 1955, BMW was ready to present a prototype of the model in New York’s Waldorf Astoria hotel. A little later this two-seater bearing the model designation 507 created a similar stir at the 1955 Frankfurt Motor Show. The subsequent development of these prototypes to production stage consumed an inordinate amount of time. Not until the end of 1956 was a 150 bhp variant of the light-alloy V8 completed, and in November of that year the first proud customer – a member of the higher nobility – took delivery of a BMW 507.

For 26,500 deutschmarks plus an extra grand for an optional hard top, the buyer received a sports car which, depending on the final gear ratio, reached speeds of up to 220 km/h and offered a spacious interior as well as a body design that ranks to this day as one of the most beautiful of all time. There was nothing remarkable about its engine performance, however. A Mercedes-Benz 300 SL or Italian sports cars of a similar category clearly outstripped this gorgeous roadster in the performance stakes. As a result, the car failed to make inroads in the performance-oriented US market, while the Old World lacked the solvent clientele to buy this kind of upmarket model.

By 1959, production numbers had run to no more than 253 BMW 507 Roadsters, 251 of them with standard bodywork. Two of the chassis were given bodies by Loewy and Michelotti respectively. The majority of these legendary sports cars have survived down to the present and count among the most exclusive four-wheeled classics of the post-war era.

### BMW 507

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>No. of units</strong></th>
<th>253 (1955 – 1959)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Original price</strong></td>
<td>26,500 marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engine</strong></td>
<td>V8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capacity</strong></td>
<td>3,168 cc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bore x stroke</strong></td>
<td>82 x 75 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Output</strong></td>
<td>150 bhp at 5,000 rpm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transmission</strong></td>
<td>four-speed stick shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brakes</strong></td>
<td>drum brakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weight</strong></td>
<td>1,330 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Top speed</strong></td>
<td>190 – 220 km/h</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the early 1950s, as the economic situation began to improve, there was a boom in small motorized vehicles of all descriptions. Bicycles were fitted with tiny auxiliary motors, dozens of moped and motorcycle manufacturers sprang up, and – inspired by the legendary Vespa – the motor scooter began its triumphant advance. In tandem with the considerable improvement in living standards, demand for the quality of vehicles also rose and the call for “weather protection” gathered pace. It wasn’t so long ago that riding a motorcycle, perhaps with a sidecar, was a source of pride. Now, however, the trend was towards abandoning heavy, weatherproof gear in favour of getting from A to B with a roof over one’s head.

Within a few years this led in Germany alone to more than 20 manu-
facturers offering a huge variety of bubble cars and small cars to suit every taste and most wallets. Necessity and sheer inventiveness turned out some strangeancies. Two passengers might be sitting one behind another in a Messerschmitt, for example, or even back-to-back, such as in the aptly named Zündapp Janus.

Although in the mid-1950s BMW had returned to car manufacturing, as well as having survived as a motorcycle producer, its large, expensive cars would only sell in limited numbers without returning any profit, while the motorcycle business had passed its zenith. As a means of survival it was decided – reluctantly – to take a highly saleable microcar up into the production programme. This belated insight meant there was no time for BMW to produce a new car of its own, since even the boom in small cars would not last forever in the further flourishing economic miracle.

And so BMW engineers set out to trawl all manner of motor shows in search of a microcar that would be suitable for production under licence in Munich. It led to the discovery in Turin of the extraordinary Isetta, built by the Iso company of Milan, which had thus far been successful in the field of cooling technology, as well as in the two-wheeled business. Despite its rather unusual first impression with a front-opening door, laterally offset two-stroke mid-engine and narrow rear wheel track, the BMW engineers nevertheless recognized the potential of this egg-shaped vehicle. The noisy, low-performance two-stroke unit was easily replaced by a smooth-running BMW motorcycle engine, and at least in this tiny vehicle the occupants were able to sit next to each other as in a proper car. The front door was especially unique, opening as it did together with the steering wheel and dashboard to enable passengers, as it were, to walk right into the car.

It took a certain amount of courage to opt for such an unconventional design, but terms were quickly agreed and BMW took on the first specimen models for further development in Munich. When the first BMW Isetta was eventually presented to the press at the Tegernsee lake in spring of 1955, it was greeted with great astonishment. Visually and technically, BMW had modified and improved the Italian original in numerous small ways. Different headlamps and a new engine cover had transformed the tiny body, and the 125 cc motorcycle engine generating 12 horsepower promised a touch over 80 km/h. The general public received the comical Isetta with great enthusiasm. It was an opportune time for unconventional models, and the car’s Italian flair played no small part in its success as the first wave of travellers headed south to warmer climes.

In 1955, its first year of production, no fewer than 13,000 Isettas rolled out of the Munich factory. While the Iso Isetta recorded sluggish sales in Italy, production numbers in Germany rose to almost 40,000 in its peak year of 1957. In the meantime, a “higher-performance” version had been launched with a 300 cc engine giving 13 bhp, a modernized body and special variants in the shape of a convertible, a tropical version and even a micro-delivery vehicle. Next to the Goggomobil by Glas, the Isetta “bubble car” became the most successful vehicle of its kind in Germany. There were even regional versions in England, Spain, France and even Brazil modelled on the BMW Isetta. Hard to match in terms of its originality, the Isetta that BMW designated a “Motocoupé” remains one of the most lovable witnesses to the motoring past.

**BMW Isetta 300 Export**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of units</th>
<th>70,350 (1956–1962)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original price</td>
<td>2,860 marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engine</td>
<td>Einzylindermotor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>298 cc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bore x stroke</td>
<td>72 x 73 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Output</td>
<td>13 PS bei 5,200 U/min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmission</td>
<td>four-speed constant mesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brakes</td>
<td>drum brakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>360 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top speed</td>
<td>85 km/h</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Egg-shaped and bristling with original features, the BMW Isetta clearly stood out from all other microcars. The BMW badge inspired confidence and contributed to the Isetta’s phenomenal success.

Heading south: for many Germans the Isetta was the first post-war car.
BMW’s fascination with high-quality cars, long demonstrated in the luxury category, now focused on the BMW 1500, the new "middle-class" car. A mature design language and attractive details contributed to the car’s success as much as its all-new engine, which propelled it to a blistering speed for the time of 150 km/h.

**BMW 1500**

**The New Class.**

BMW’s pride in its all-new 1500 model, unveiled in 1961, could not be disguised. Indeed, BMW really did set new benchmarks with this medium-range car. It was a model that made the image of BMW’s large luxury models affordable for new customer groups from the middle classes. With the 1500, BMW tapped into a completely new market segment with tremendous sales potential. This was also the model that finally enabled the company to make its name as an internationally renowned car manufacturer. Its successful concept was perpetuated with a range of engine variants before being replaced by the first 5 Series in 1972.

"In the history of automobile production there can be few models that have been the subject of such exhaustive discussion in public prior to their launch as the new middle-class car by BMW.

In its car designs, BMW had traditionally struck a very individual note that combined dynamic driving with the refinement of true motoring comfort, and matched timeless elegance – one need mention only the unforgettable BMW 327 – with exceptional driving safety. The large BMW eight-cylinders once again proved and cemented this high standard in terms of top speed, acceleration, tracking stability, secure cornering ability, roadholding and braking ability. But they were in a price band that imposed a clear limit on their distribution right from the start.

The desire so often and emphatically conveyed to the company to see a car in the medium displacement class endowed with such BMW credentials tallied with the task the engineers had set themselves following the launch of their eight-cylinder model. And so the BMW 1500 looked back on a lengthy development phase during which its design, naturally enough, was continual being adapted to ongoing technical advances. "A car in the BMW tradition, however, has an obligation to be ahead of its time." … Thus ran an excerpt from the press kit accompanying the presentation of the new BMW 1500 at the 1961 Frankfurt Motor Show.

Indeed, a great deal of time had elapsed since the mid-1950s when BMW had realized the urgent need for a modern medium-range car and launched initial development work. At the time, however, the company was in no financial position to carry through a project for the creation of an all-new mid-range car. Only when the Quandt family interceded in 1959 did the company’s situation change.
The Munich carmakers landed an extraordinary coup with their 02 Series. Partly built from tried and tested components, it was practical and dynamic at the same time: a formula that turned the entire series into a sweeping success.

The new “middle-class car” was eventually conceived as a four-door saloon with a unitized body, its design arising from a collaboration with Italian stylist Giovanni Michelotti, who had already played a major part in creating the body for the BMW 700 small car. As for its engine, eventually an all-new 1.5-litre, four-cylinder in-line unit was developed under the direction of BMW’s “engine guru” of the time, Alexander von Falkenhausen. It generated 80 bhp, taking the car to a top speed of 150 km/h – an outstanding figure compared with the competition of the time. While the 1961 Frankfurt Show witnessed a prototype version, by the autumn of 1962 the first production models were coming off the assembly line in Munich.

Soon the talk was of the “New Class” – another genuine BMW at last! In the years that followed, this new BMW 1500 would constitute the engineering and design basis for an entire model series offering a range of different engines and equipment levels, including the basic racing model 1800 TiSA and the fuel-injected BMW 2000 tii variant. The new coupé range launched in 1965, featuring the 2000 C and CS models, was based on the New Class, and even the 02 Series unveiled the following year was closely related to the four-door models at least in terms of its engineering.

For BMW, the sweeping success of its New Class finally brought about the company’s breakthrough as a manufacturer of modern cars with international appeal. Although the original BMW 1500 was only produced until 1964, the entire model series – almost identical in appearance – would remain in production until 1972, when it was replaced by the first BMW 5 Series.

The BMW 2002 came to symbolize what was by far the most successful BMW model to date, the 02 Series. From 1968 to 1975, the 2002 was an object of desire for sports-minded BMW drivers, and remains so today for fans of BMW classics of the more recent past. Frequently featuring typical 1970s paintwork, such as Golf yellow or Colorado orange, these 100 bhp, compact four-seater models united the hallmark BMW virtues of dynamism and functionality to a far greater degree than the models of the New Class: they were “family carriages” and sports cars rolled into one. What the two-door 1600 model began for BMW in 1966, the
The circular tail-lights were one of the most striking details of the 02 Series, which also claimed major successes on the race track.

A BMW 2002 in a colour that typified the 1970s – Inca orange – and sporting a striking array of extra headlamps.

Management was initially somewhat hesitant, but in the end sales director Paul Hahniemann once again managed to persuade the men on BMW’s executive floor that such a car could not fail to succeed. He was to be proved right. It wasn’t only the German and European markets that were interested in and ready for a fast compact model of this kind; above all the now buoyant US market could undoubtedly be enlarged with this model, since the fastest two-door car until then, the 1600 TI, could not be exported to the United States on account of its unfavourable exhaust emission figures.

Already announced by BMW’s press department as a “powerpack”, the BMW 2002 in no way disappointed the great expectations placed in it. The price of the new model, too, was a genuine sensation. Since all its components had already been tried and tested and were present in BMW’s “construction set”, the 2002 went on sale with a price tag of 8,400 deutschmarks. For the same price as a 90 bhp Opel Rekord 1900 S, which took 16 seconds from standstill to 100 km/h, sporty BMW fans could now acquire a four-seater with a larger boot that did the sprint in 10.7 seconds flat. It now took a bona fide sports car such as a Porsche 911 or a Ferrari Dino to leave a BMW 2002 trailing in its wake.

Not surprisingly, then, this BMW 2002 became the symbol of an entire, highly diverse model series to which it eventually gave its name – the 02 Series. In order to clearly differentiate the new two-door model from the still high-selling four-door New Class model with its two-litre engine, the 2000, BMW came up with the model name 2002, in which the last digit referred to the number of doors. It wasn’t long before all model designations in this series, with the exception of the convertible, ended in a “2”. On account of its superior performance, the BMW 2002 had no need for ostentation. It didn’t even have a script badge on the radiator grille, only at the rear. With this model, the meaning of “understatement” took on a new dimension in German car manufacturing.

In its debut production year, BMW sold around 29,000 examples of the 2002 model. Up until 1972, that figure would steadily rise to almost 60,000 units a year. Around 20 percent of the cars went to the USA in an unprecedented export achievement.

The BMW 2002 as an emblematic representative of the BMW 02 Series proved to be economically fortunate to an unsurpassed degree. The benefits that came as standard with this model, and above all the phenomenal motor sport success story it was about to embark on, perfectly complemented each other to make the BMW 2002 an object of desire for an entire generation of performance-conscious motorists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BMW 2002 No. of units</th>
<th>339,092 (1968 – 1975)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original price</td>
<td>8,400 marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engine</td>
<td>four-cylinder-in-line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>1,990 cc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bore x stroke</td>
<td>89 x 80 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Output</td>
<td>100 bhp at 5,500 rpm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmission</td>
<td>four or five-speed stick shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bremser</td>
<td>front: disc brakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rear: drum brakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>940 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top speed</td>
<td>170 km/h</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1972 to 1988: new generations

In the early 1970s, BMW ushered in a new model policy which has essentially remained in place to this day. The company introduced a systematic scheme of model series, each designated by a number. It began with the 5 Series, which was followed by the incredibly successful 3 Series range, the exclusive coupés of the 6 Series, and finally, in 1977, the first models of the 7 Series. It was an era that also saw the inception of the M model designation: since then it has been an unmistakable hallmark of all BMW models endeavouring to be the “most powerful letter in the world”, to show that their engineering is closely akin to that of the brand’s race models.

Three years after the first 5 Series was launched, the highly successful 02 Series was also replaced by models featuring the new-look styling. This new BMW 3 Series, known by the internal code name of E 21, would soundly break all previous sales records of BMW cars up to the end of its production in 1983. With sales of 1.36 million examples, the company crossed the magical million threshold for the first time in its history. Compared to the 02 models, the first BMW 3 Series cars were much more comfortably designed, while the addition of several six-cylinder models to the range also appreciably raised the company’s prestige in this class. For those in search of a particularly exclusive car, there was the possibility of acquiring a so-called “T opcabriolet” from Baur of Stuttgart. Fixed window frames and a roll bar ensured that the requisite safety standards were met, and the entire spectrum of BMW 3 Series engines was available. The Stuttgart coachbuilders would go on to produce modified open-top versions of the BMW 3 Series range well into the 1990s.

BMW struck out in an unusual direction with the BMW M1, a racing model also designed for road use.

Mobile Tradition live / 75 Years of BMW Automobiles Special
The BMW M1 took shape from a brief to build a roadworthy sports racer. During its development and production, BMW took number of risks, but in the end a car was born which has lost none of its fascination to this day thanks to its engine performance, handling characteristics and highly distinctive design. When production was phased out in February 1981, a total of 456 units had been built, including the racing versions. Above all its involvement in the Procar Series racing events, specially designed for the M1, will remain unforgotten.

BMW M1
For the race track and the road – a bold experiment.

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In the late 1970s, the BMW M1 sports car ranked among the fastest of its kind in the world, and to this day it radiates the kind of fascination that turns cars into classics and makes a mockery of any deliberations on their measurable economic success.

Jochen Neerpasch, previously Ford’s successful race manager and from May of 1972 the managing director of the newly founded BMW Motorsport GmbH, returned to the task of creating a thoroughbred sports racer in 1975. The energy crisis and the attendant throttling of both engine power and advertising activity was almost forgotten, and there was a new explosion of performance in the world of car manufacturing. The Porsche 911 and Ford Capri were now the chief rivals to be vanquished on the race track.

Once the E 26 project was given the go-ahead, the problem was how to complete development and production of this all-new model in the time that remained. Due to insufficient capacity, BMW was forced to take the risky step of commissioning outside companies with crucial construction tasks. An uncertain adventure was on the cards. In late 1975, BMW commissioned the ItalDesign company, whose design chief was Giorgetto Giugiaro, with creating a body for the intended super sports car. Needless to say, the heart of the new M1 had to bear the signature of the BMW engineers. A team led by engine specialists Paul Rosche and Martin Braungart were given the task of providing the new sports car with a superior power unit that was suitable not just for the road but above all for the race track as well. In the end, it was decided to upgrade the new 3.5-litre six-cylinder engine as used in the 635CSi Coupé.
Profile BMW M1

The BMW M1 has remained unforgettable in motor racing, particularly for its involvement in the Procar racing series that was conceived for this model and contested by Formula One drivers in identical models.

But the “tuning” job turned out to be far more extensive than anticipated. Only the cylinder block could be taken over from the production engine. A divided cylinder head with four-valve technology had to be developed from scratch. Furthermore, the new engine – named the M 88 – was given a Kugelfischer mechanical fuel injection system and dry sump lubrication. The final result was 277 bhp/204 kW for the street version.

But the joint venture with Lamborghini ran into problems, and new partners had to be sought. One of these was BMW’s longstanding collaborator Baur, who had developed a number of special models for BMW at their premises outside Stuttgart. With their customary meticulousness, the Swabians implanted the “heart” into the new sports car in the shape of the power unit supplied by BMW Motorsport. The brakes, wheel suspensions, pedals, steering column and all the other components were similarly installed by Baur. Only after painstaking fine-tuning, alignment and test drives were the completed M1 models delivered to BMW Motorsport, where they underwent a final inspection before being taken to a special showroom ready to be presented to their customers.

The official debut of the M1 at the Paris Motor Show in October 1978 created a stir among fans of high-calibre sports cars, but it wasn’t until February 1979 that the first customer was able to take delivery of his BMW M1. All those involved in Project E 26 had succeeded in creating a highly impressive sports car. Even when parked, the M1 emanated supreme dynamism. Less than six seconds for the standstill to 100 km/h sprint and barely more than 20 seconds from 0 to 200 km/h were figures matched by no more than a handful of cars worldwide. The suspension system, designed with the 470 bhp Group 4 M1 models in mind, coped easily with the kind of braking, acceleration and lateral acceleration forces associated with the race track. Steering was commensurately high-geared and had no servo assistance in the interests of improved road grip. Yet the M1 driver did not have to forgo comfort features such as air conditioning, electric window lifts and a steering wheel with axial adjustment. The cost of the street version was 113,000 deutschmarks.

Yet the high hopes placed in the racing career of the M1 would be only partially fulfilled. Too much time had been spent on development work, making it impossible to keep within schedule for Group 4 homologation. But what remained for the public to enjoy was the Procar racing series specially devised for the M1. In early February 1981, finally, the last two M1 models out of a total production run of 456 – including the race versions – were completed at the Baur assembly plant. Uniquely in the history of the brand, each M1 displayed three BMW logos – symbolizing the utterly unique status of this tamed driving machine.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BMW M1 (production model)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bore x stroke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Output</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top speed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BMW M3

The sporty success formula.

With the M3 BMW finally made the economic breakthrough with its ultra-sporty models. The 5,000 units required for homologation purposes were easily sold, encouraging BMW to produce more and more M3-based versions, some in very limited editions.

The M3 was derived from the BMW 3 Series E 30 range introduced in 1982 and marked the dazzling start of an extraordinary success story which continues undiminished to this day.

The M3 unveiled in Mugello in 1986 was the latest, emphatically sporty, top-of-the-line BMW 3 Series model. This street sports car boasted a 195 bhp/143 kW engine (200 bhp/147 kW without a catalytic converter) with a cylinder head featuring four-valve technology. Its body sported muscular flared wheel arches, door sills and a front and rear apron. It was in every way geared to
motor racing, and thus became the unofficial successor to the M1. Unlike the mid-engine sports car, the M3 was not to be a hand-built limited edition but a volume-production car off the assembly line. It was earmarked for touring car racing, which involved cars in near-standard production trim. More precisely, it was to be a Group A racing car, defined as a “production car” according to Annex J of the international motor sport regulations, which stipulated that at least 5,000 units be built within twelve consecutive months.

The 2.3-litre four-cylinder in-line engine of the M3 was a synthesis of the experience gleaned from racing and insights into production engine design. Unlike the mid-engine sports car, the M3 was not to be a hand-built limited edition but a volume-production car off the assembly line. It was earmarked for touring car racing, which involved cars in near-standard production trim. More precisely, it was to be a Group A racing car, defined as a “production car” according to Annex J of the international motor sport regulations, which stipulated that at least 5,000 units be built within twelve consecutive months. The 2.3-litre four-cylinder in-line engine of the M3 was a synthesis of the experience gleaned from racing and insights into production engine design. The cylinder head with four-valve technology was clearly related in design to that of the M1 engine.

A four-cylinder engine was chosen because the shorter crankshaft compared to a six-cylinder unit promised higher engine speed reserves. Keen attention was also given to the chassis, which received a special, lower set-up with a new front axle geometry, more direct power steering and a high-performance braking system with ABS. It all made for performance (0–100 km/h in 6.7 seconds, top speed 235 km/h) that was unmatched worldwide in this vehicle class.

Despite its basic price of a substantial 58,000 deutschmarks, the 5,000 M3 production units required for homologation purposes were easily sold within the requisite period of time, and the M3 race versions were able to embark on their now legendary career in touring car racing. Inciting special interest among fans of exceptional sports cars were several special editions of the BMW M3, usually limited to around 500 units, such as the “Evolution”, “Sport Evolution” and “Cecotto”, which are already sought-after today as absolute rarities. 1988 saw the appearance of an M3 convertible variant with highly exclusive specifications, which saw a production run of just 786.

In the light of the sweeping success of this, the sportiest of all BMW 3 Series models, it comes as no surprise that BMW went on to reinterpret the M3 for the subsequent E 36 and E 46 3 Series ranges. Only recently, the BMW M3 CSL was launched as a particularly dynamic and technically intriguing rendition of the now classic M3 theme.

### BMW M3 (E30)

| No. of units | 17,184 (1986 – 1990) |
| Engine       | four-cylinder in-line |
| Capacity     | 2,302 cc |
| Bore x stroke| 93.4 x 84 mm |
| Output       | 200 bhp at 6,750 rpm |
| Transmission | five-speed stick shift |
| Brakes       | disc brakes |
| Weight       | 1,200 kg |
| Top speed    | 235 km/h |
BMW Z1
Innovative roadster of the 1980s.

The BMW Z1 was an impressive continuation of BMW’s great roadster tradition and featured a raft of technical innovations, a high-performance engine, a monocoque-style unitary frame, retractable doors, plastic body panels and a specially developed Z axle. Only the engine stemmed from the volume-produced 325i.

In January 1989, the first Z1 was put on display at the Geneva Motor Show. Work had already been well advanced on the project by then and the prototype had been completed by mid-1988. The decision was made to give the car the 170 bhp six-cylinder production engine of the BMW 325i, which propelled the roadster – known by the internal development code name “Z” – to a top speed in excess of 220 km/h. One year after its press launch, which had triggered keen public interest the model went into series production.

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At the Geneva Motor Show in March 1988, the production version of this innovative sports car concept was finally unveiled before the public. The skill of the engineers had lain in taking ready units from BMW’s existing range and integrating them in the roadster concept. Thus the 170 bhp six-cylinder engine of the 325i was also selected for the production Z1 as it matched the general character of the roadster particularly well. It was mounted behind the front axle, making the Z1 a so-called “front mid-engine” car. It made the classic standstill to 100 km/h in less than eight seconds and clocked an impressive top speed of 227 km/h. Its power was conveyed via a five-speed gearbox in a fixed transaxle tube to the rear axle. The sporty suspension consisted of a spring-strut front axle taken from the 3 Series and an all-new Z rear axle, with disc brakes on all four wheels as standard. The interior trim and colours were designed entirely to match the character of this modern roadster. Initially, there was a choice of just four colours specially selected for the Z1: black metallic, green metallic, yellow and red. The driver and passenger sat in sports seats specifically developed for the Z1, while the instruments were pared down to the essentials in the true spirit of the classic roadster, though without appearing overly spartan.

In 1985, BMW Technik GmbH was set up as a small think tank with the aim of developing forward-looking products. With the Z1 launched in the 1980s, BMW created an extremely innovative concept that has lost none of its appeal and fascination.

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BMW 750i

Luxury saloon with impressive engine performance from 12 cylinders.

The BMW 7 Series positioned the company firmly in the automotive luxury class. This was enduringly demonstrated by the BMW 750i, whose 12-cylinder engine put all other rivals in the shade and revived a tradition that had last been seen in Germany’s motoring industry back in the 1930s. Equipment levels and engine performance left nothing to be desired, with many a sports car struggling to keep pace with this speedy saloon. With such impressive specifications it comes as no surprise that the 750i was a big seller despite its hefty price tag: more than 48,500 short and long-wheelbase versions of this luxury saloon left the factory.

With the introduction of the new 7 Series (E 32 line), BMW made, as it were, a quantum leap in the bid for success in the luxury saloon category. The 7 Series had a very compact, even sporty appearance compared to its competitors, and blended dynamism, modernity and prestige in a way rarely seen in this class.

Just ten months after this impressive launch, BMW unveiled the 750i, a car the likes of which Germany had not seen since the 1930s – a 12-cylinder. The two model variants, the 750i and the 750iL with a wheelbase extended by some 12 cm, were in every respect in a class of their own.

Naturally the new BMW flagship could not deny its close kinship with its six-cylinder counterpart. But it was mainly the extended range of standard fittings that revealed the subtle difference in visual terms alone. Full Nappa leather upholstery in a choice of seven colours, electrically adjustable front seats with memory function in the 750iL, electrically adjustable rear headrests and seats, automatic climate control, an infrared locking system, cruise control and self-leveling suspension left no gaps in the luxury attributes of the 750i. There were many luxury-class saloons on the road, of course, but the new 12-cylinder engine ensured that the BMW 750i stood out from the crowd of four-wheeled status symbols.

Identifiable by its very discreet exterior featuring a broader “kidney grille” and a wider scoop on the bonnet, as well as angular rather than round exhaust pipes, it was only with the engine compartment lid open that the full glory of this pinnacle of engine design was revealed to the owner of a BMW 750i. The BMW V12 had been conceived with the aim of combining the highest standards in performance, compact design, fuel economy and emission levels. The result occupied a leading position in the international arena. The brief had been fulfilled thanks to the use of cutting-edge technologies and the systematic implementation of innovative ideas. Tipping the scales at just 240 kg, the 5-litre V12 unit set a benchmark in terms of its weight alone. An output of 300 bhp/220 kW at 5,200 rpm and peak torque of 450 Nm at 4,100 rpm surpassed similar engine concepts in the market. Despite an overall weight of at least 1,800 kg, the cosseted passengers in the BMW 750i were propelled from 0 to 100 km/h in a matter of 7.4 seconds. The car’s speed was cut off at 250 km/h by an electronic limiter.

Nobody was surprised when this milestone in BMW’s automotive history became a triumphant success. Up to the end of production in 1994, more than 48,500 BMW 750i/iL models of the first E 32 series were produced. To this day, BMW has remained faithful to this exclusive engine concept for the luxury class.
By the 1980s BMW had lost none of its innovative prowess, turning out such forward-looking models as the BMW Z1 Roadster with its famous retractable doors, or the 12-cylinder 750i luxury saloon. It also unveiled interesting new concepts in the shape of its 8 Series Coupés. It is a tradition to which BMW remains faithful in the present and beyond: in launching the new 6 Series or the X3, the company is fusing its own past and future in characteristic BMW style.

by Walter Zeichner

What had begun in the 1970s with a remarkable diversity of models and variants based on BMW’s precise alignment of its model ranges would be expanded further during the following two decades thanks to the company’s highly successful model policy. But it would be beyond the scope of this publication even to broach the most important developments, model variants and innovations which BMW presented to the motoring world in this short space of time. So we shall turn instead to some of the outstanding automobiles that are unquestionably the stuff of classics.

Anyone who thought that in the mid-1980s BMW had reached the apex of exclusivity was in for a fascinating surprise in 1989. The development brief for the new 850i luxury coupé had been to build the best and most modern sports coupé in the world. The highest comfort levels, a design that was an impressive fusion of dynamism and exclusivity, BMW engineering and technology at the limit of what was then physically possible, powered by the V12 unit, of course, plus highlights such as four-wheel steering (active rear axle kinematics), all catapulted this car well into the lead among the rarefied competition worldwide.

It was yet another unparalleled international success, with sales of more than 20,000 8 Series V12 Coupés up to the end of production in 1999.

The 1990s and early 21st century were and are marked by the expansion of the company’s brand portfolio, the development of innovative and alternative technologies such as hydrogen-powered drive units, and a further diversification of the BMW model ranges and variants.

Based on the technology of the third generation of the 3 Series, a new BMW roadster was unveiled at the 1995 Detroit Auto Show – the Z3. Built entirely at the new BMW production plant in Spartanburg, South Carolina, this open-topped two-seater with its exciting styling enjoyed widespread publicity when it debuted in the James Bond movie GoldenEye, and quickly became a sensational success. The first roadsters were launched with four-cylinder engines, soon to be followed by high-performance six-cylinder sports cars, all the way to the M roadster with an output of over 300 brake horsepower. The sibling Z3 coupé with its fixed roof and distinctive tail end was a particularly striking model.

Towards the end of 1999, a vehicle concept that was a complete novelty in the BMW range went into series production at the Spartanburg plant: the X5 “Sports Activity Vehicle” (SAV). This upmarket combination of a sporty five-door model and an off-road all-wheel drive was just what motoring fans with a sense of adventure were waiting for. The model line built at BMW’s US plant was powered by six and eight-cylinder engines, and also proved a global success story.

On the threshold of the third millennium, a new, superlative BMW roadster was launched on the marketplace. Already at its premiere it was being described as a classic. First unveiled as a design study at the Tokyo Motor Show in 1997, the new BMW Z8 Roadster united classic styling elements with innovative aluminium lightweight design and the most powerful engine to be mounted in a production car in BMW history. 400 bhp propelled this exciting two-seater from standstill to 100 km/h in an astonishing 4.7 seconds and lent it a literally breathtaking performance even beyond the 200 km/h mark. Largely hand-built in a special assembly shop at the Munich plant and produced in limited numbers, the Z8 – following the example of its role model, the BMW 507 – will similarly go down as a milestone in the history of BMW automobiles.

The latest enhancements to the BMW model range in the shape of the X3 variants, the new 6 Series and the forthcoming 1 Series will provide the steadily expanding circle of BMW drivers with a renewed wealth of models that promise to turn the BMW slogan “Sheer Driving Pleasure” into tangible reality.
High time for an autobiography.

This year BMW celebrates 75 years of BMW automobile production. To look back is also to look forward. The story begins in the year 1929 with the launch of a modern small car, followed by such milestones as the BMW 328 and the iconic 2002. Today BMW continues writing this story with each new model. That is how visions of the past have become today’s history. And that is how visions of today will in turn write tomorrow’s history. There’s no future without a past.