

Driving Impressions

ALPINA B10 BITURBO

Testarossa performance, Silver Spirit silence

BY PAUL FRERE

PHOTOS BY JOHN LAMM

FROM THE VERY beginning, Alpina's products have been based on cars from BMW, with which it operates in close cooperation. I have driven many fascinating cars from Alpina and even owned one, but the 535i-based B10 Biturbo is surely the most impressive of them all: a comfortable 4-door that blends Rolls-Royce silence with Testarossa performance, with road manners to match. Only its bodyshell and basic

suspension parts remain essentially as produced by BMW.

When the car arrives at the Alpina works in Buchloe, Germany, the engine is completely dismantled. Forged pistons are fitted and all moving pieces rebalanced. The combustion chambers are remachined, and new valves (sodium-cooled on the exhaust side) and a new camshaft are fitted. The intake and exhaust systems are entirely Alpina. They include new exhaust manifolds sup-

plying twin Garrett T25 water-cooled turbochargers with an integrated, electronically controlled wastegate feeding the engine through a large intercooler.

Fuel injection and ignition are by Bosch Motronic. The entire exhaust system is made of stainless steel and includes no less than six metal-core catalysts with Lambda-Sond control. Maximum boost pressure is 11.4 psi, but a knob on the instrument console allows this to be reduced to 5.7



■ Where else but in Germany can a speedometer needle edge past the 300-km/h mark? And what cars do it with as much ease and comfort as the Alpina B10 Biturbo? Precious few. Alpina's twin-turbo treatment furnishes BMW's 3.5-liter six with a whopping 360 bhp and 384 lb.-ft. of torque.

psi to avoid excess power on slippery surfaces. The result at full boost is an output of 360 bhp DIN at 6000 rpm and mammoth torque—384 lb.-ft.

As this is more than the standard BMW 535i clutch and gearbox can take, a stronger Fichtel & Sachs clutch and a 5-speed gearbox, specially developed by Getrag, transmit the drive to the beefed-up rear axle, which includes a 25-percent limited-slip differential.

Light-alloy 17-in. Alpina multi-

spoke wheels make room for larger-than-standard Girling brakes with 4-piston front calipers. Linear-rate springs are used all around with anti-roll bars and Bilstein-damped front struts. At the rear, the Fichtel & Sachs shock absorbers also control the ride height, which is hydraulically adjusted by an electronically operated high-pressure system.

This system is essential because the 3735-lb. B10's camber is affected by suspension movements. And

when the B10 reaches a maximum speed of 181 mph, it's even more important. Excessive negative camber could cause the tires to overheat and fail at sustained speeds of this order. The B10's tires are ultra-low-profile Michelin MXX2s on 8½- and 9½-in.-wide rims front and rear, respectively. The power-assisted steering is recalibrated to suit Alpina requirements. A special front air dam and rear spoiler are added to combat aerodynamic lift.

The interior trim is specific to Alpina and incorporates the company's own fabric. A B10 buyer gets a choice of BMW-based or Alpina front seats, as well as a special steering wheel, polished wood door and console trim. Traction control is standard, and a switch enables the driver to override it. Air conditioning is also standard, along with a superb radio/cassette sound system.

Acceleration in the standing-start kilometer (0.62 mile) is 24.7 seconds, faster than a Ferrari 348, a Porsche 911 Carrera 2 or 4 or an Acura NSX. But almost more impressive is the effortlessness—and the silence—with which the B10 Biturbo accelerates.

The twin-turbo installation of the B10 has spectacularly reduced turbo lag. Thanks to the low inertia of the two small turbochargers and to the electronic wastegate control, response is nearly immediate in almost any circumstance. Nor does the boost build with a bang. It rises progressively in a well-controlled manner, with 370 lb.-ft. of torque already on hand as the engine reaches 3000 rpm. Torque remains above this figure until 5000





rpm, and reaches its peak of 384 lb.-ft. at 4000 rpm.

The B10 reached a maximum speed of 181 mph. At such speeds, the car feels entirely stable, with no suggestion of the front end getting light or any tendency to wander.

Neither wind nor road noise is obtrusive. Cruising at 125 mph feels positively slow, and flooring the accelerator pedal catapults the heavy car forward—irrespective of whether 4th or 5th gear is selected—without

the din usually associated with all-out acceleration from such speeds. The gearbox is another fine piece of machinery. It is inaudible in any gear, and its smooth action allows for some quick shifts.

With such performance, the brakes are put to the challenge, and they do their job admirably. Handling is definitely of sports-car character, the B10 cornering quite flatly in a slightly understeering attitude that can easily be changed by reducing the throttle

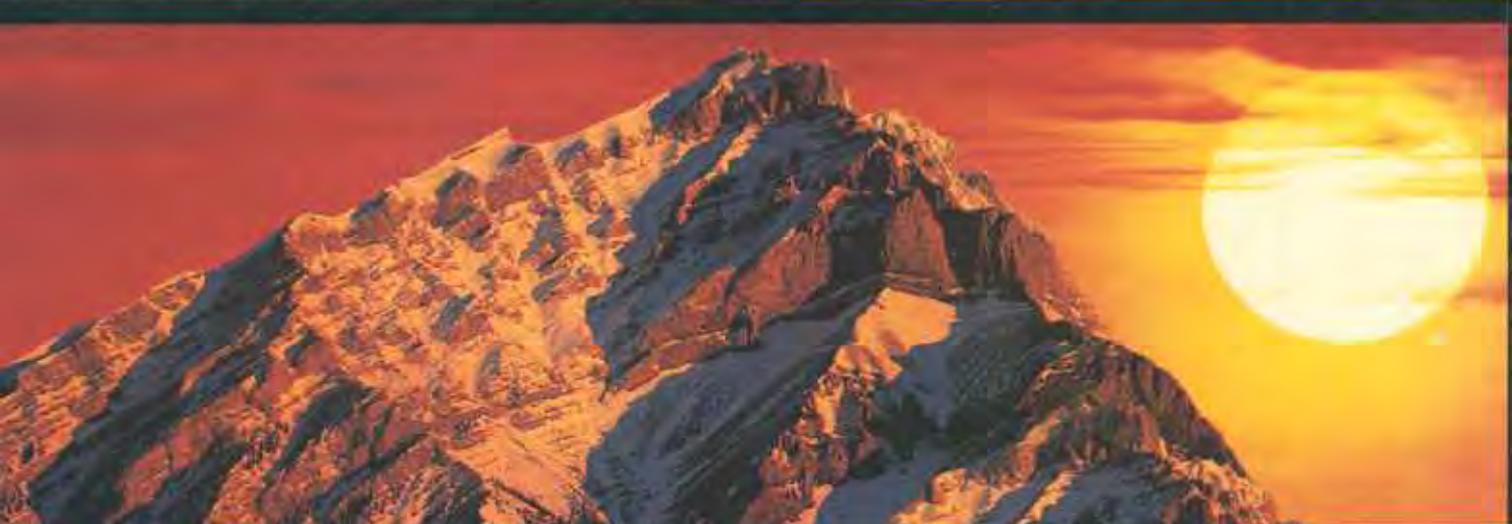
opening. Apart from a little vagueness around the straight-ahead position, the power-assist steering is excellent.

The Alpina's comfort level was another bright surprise. The suspension is rather firm, inspiring a great sense of safety, but even at low speeds it does not feel harsh. How much low-speed harshness is perceived depends to a large extent on acoustics, and the B10's good insulation probably helps. This is one reason why Alpina chose Michelin MXX2 tires.

The B10's fuel consumption in dense Munich traffic averaged a remarkable 19 mpg. I averaged 100 mph from Hockenheim to the outskirts of Munich for a fuel consumption figure of 14.1 mpg, astonishingly economical taking into account that the engine's full potential was used wherever possible. Even driven at those speeds, the range provided by the 29-gal. fuel tank should exceed 400 miles.

What more could one wish for? Apart from the small steering problem and stiff clutch-pedal action, the BMW Alpina B10 Biturbo would truly be the perfect car. 

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