

The Hauling Service

P. Ghisold Stout uncovers Bavarian Professionals' M5 Touring, your only chance to carry an American Cub Scout troop in BMW M style.



When you're after high-speed travel with cargo, the fast, nimble and spacious BMW M5 Touring is hard to beat. Unfortunately for us, like a host of BMW's other delectable M variants, this Motorsport masterpiece is not imported stateside.

That's exactly why Berkeley, California's Bavarian Professionals has taken it upon itself to create US-legal M5 Tourings the only way possible: By building them from scratch. The conversion requires a complete M5 driveline, accessory set and some trim parts, preferably from a wrecked example. These donor organs plus labor bring the conversion price to more or less \$35,000, plus of course the 1993-95 BMW 525i/530i Touring recipient.

The conversion requires six weeks, during which time the entire driveline (including accessories) and all the M5's brake and suspension parts are transferred to the Touring body. The donor's complete aero package and related interior items - right down to the backlit Motorsport shift knob - are included as well. The finished product is virtually a clone of the factory's own car.

A twist of the key brings the highly tuned Six to life with an intoxicating burble many musclecars would kill for. Otherwise, the hulking wagon draws little attention to itself in traffic, though those in the know are sure to do a double-take. Motoring through town isn't the M5's forte anyway; the car truly comes into its own upon leaving the gridlock and hitting open country.

Your first impression is of the car's sizable mass shrinking down around you. The clutch effort is fairly light, the gearshift direct and positive and the engine motivates this madness with a smoothness that belies its true intent. Entering the freeway its BMW Motorsport-designed Six exhibits a broad torque band and a wonderful siren song from the tailpipes; nary a hiccup interrupts this aria all the way to the 7000-rpm redline, which arrives quickly enough to warrant a careful eye on the oversized tach. The M5's 3.6-liter DOHC powerplant produces 343 horsepower, or nearly 100 more than Volvo's new T5R.

Even in fifth gear, the engine is a willing - and pleasantly audible - companion, but it's only when you exercise your right arm and both feet that it truly comes alive. This car is capable of obscene passes with a quick downshift or two - passes that leave other motorists wondering what's on sale at the grocery store. Long, sweeping roads become equally addictive as two tons of steel set themselves up for each bend with invincible stability and far more grip than any wagon should claim. Massive, fade-free brakes - 12.8 and 11.8 inches front to rear - only reinforce that confidence.

The M5 Touring's real surprise comes on small, twisty sections of tarmac. What seems like a recipe for a ponderous low-speed car instead makes an entertaining partner for backroad jaunts. The tuning firm's fitment of 17-inch shoes wearing 235/45 Toyo tires is an inspiration to probe the chassis' limits, which could be a dangerous proposition were the suspension not so nicely sorted out. The steering is not the most communicative, but it's quick and accurate enough to plant the tires where you want them. All these qualities add up to the elusive sensation of a car that seems smaller at speed than it does around town. The garden-variety 5-series sedan feels far larger by comparison.

While Bavarian Professionals' finish work proves generally exquisite, BMW's questionable factory paint quality is always a disappointment. Fortunately, the driver of this wagon may never notice: The Touring's interior receives the M5's excellent power sport seats, and luxury appointments abound in beautiful leather and dark wood. The Motorsport instrumentation is clear and legible - though less than comprehensive for such a sporting car - and a particularly trick feature is BMW's Touring-only double sunroof. The resulting vehicle is more than worthy of the Motorsport badge; the finish of the interior and engine bay is indistinguishable from that a standard M5, which is a high target indeed.

Of course, the high quality of this conversion comes at a not-inconsiderable cost. Added to the already dear sticker of a 525i or 530i Touring starting point, the M5 treatment's final sticker price may induce nosebleeds in its fans. No one is going to make this decision lightly.

If nothing else, though, you can find solace in the fact that even native Germans must pay similarly hefty prices for a factory-made M5 Touring in Europe, where the wagon makes up roughly half of all M5 sales. Besides, this isn't a car for everyone, just the discerning few whose specialized needs - and wallets - will make it the only game in town. While BMW believes there aren't enough paying customers to warrant factory importation of this 5-door work of art, after driving this faithful American analog you can't help but be glad someone else has taken the task upon themselves.

SPECIFICATIONS

Bavarian Professionals
BMW M5 Touring

General

Vehicle type: front-engine RWD wagon

Structure: steel unibody

Market: United States MSRP: (BMW 525i or 530i Touring) + \$35,000

Hardpoints

Engine: 3.6-liter longitudinal DOHC 24-valve L6

Power (bhp): 343 @ 6800 rpm

Torque (lbs.-ft.) 294 @ 4000 rpm

Transmission type: 5-speed manual

Wheelbase (in.): 108.7

Length (in.): 185.8

Width (in.): 77.7

Suspension, brakes

Suspension, front: MacPherson struts with lower arms, coil springs and antiroll bar

Suspension, rear: semi-trailing arms with locating links, coil springs and antiroll bar

Brakes, f/r: disc/disc

ABS: std.

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