

Bmw has been cleverly bringing some smaller engines into its lineup, such as the 2-liter twin turbo, a natural in the little Z4 roadster, also now in the big 5 Series sedan (called a 528i, despite its 2.0L engine). It's a good move, offering a balance of power and fuel efficiency as federal requirements tighten, as well as the various other blessings that come with lighter weight. But it tickles our innards to receive the BMW 650i Coupe... not really an exercise in excess, just a different kind of balance. And poise. And luxury. And power.

It's no surprise that we find this car nice from the get-go. It looks good pulling up, it looks great getting in. We are immediately at one with the cockpit, and one tasteful chime welcomes us as we fasten the seatbelt. There's plenty of interior

space and plenty of headroom, for a sleeky two-door coupe. Our logbook calls the interior "gorgeous, very well executed." The MMI controller, for years the sometimes controversial core of all controls, has been moved over to the side. The Bang & Olufsen audio system has a small speaker unit at the top center of the instrument panel, which was raised when we received the car, then retracted when we turned the sound off. It's a clean implementation, which we may prefer to the Audi A8 with its obtrusive little cylinders in the windshield's corners. The A-pillars curve around enough in this that you wouldn't be able to do the Audi implementation, anyway. In fact, the curve from the doors to the A-pillars is part of what gives this car such a cozy and yet roomy feel.

POWER PLAY

We were informed by a prior driver that "all you have to do is look at the gas pedal and you will hit the speed limit." It definitely is a smooth, powerful vehicle. The 4.4-liter twin-turbo V8—this car is called a 650i despite its 4.4L engine—hits 400 hp at high rpms (5500-6400) and makes peak torque of 450 lb-ft over a broad range (1750-4500). This combination gives the car its strong launch and powerful cruise. Estimated fuel mileage is 15/23 MPG city/highway (18 combined). The engine's reverse-flow layout, with two turbochargers in the V between cylinder banks, produces instantaneous and sustained thrust you can feel. Our tester came with BMW's new 8-speed Sport Automatic, but the car is also available with a 6-speed manual. With either

The luxurious feeling imparted by the interior perfectly reflects the elegant body and drivetrain. Asymmetrical door-mounted controls, grips and speakers seem to be a current BMW hallmark.

transmission, 0-to-60 time is 4.8 seconds, and top speed is electronically limited to 155 mph. A heads-up display helps you keep track of your speed, especially useful in a car like this—which can comfortably and easily dust almost anything, any time.

Exhaust notes receive a lot of attention these days and are often heavily engineered. Some are highly contrived, artificial. This one is the real deal, and it's a beauty—a powerful yet refined alternative to kid-racer effects. On a nice upper-50s January evening, coasting through a business park after hours, we hear nothing but the breeze out our open window. Give it a little gas and we hear a soft, rich burble. So many cars are so overdone, but you get more elegance out of a little less noise.

LITTLE LOGBOOK NOTES

We would tell the sound engineers that the engine note may be nice and subtle, as is the chime when you enter, but the beep when you lock or unlock the door is enough to wake up half the neighborhood.

We needed the owner's manual to expedite the finer points of some settings, such as audio and mapping, but it was worth it—the complex interface is full of simple shortcuts and solutions.

An on/off/volume switch for audio in the upper left of the stack, plus tuning done by the MMI knob on the right half of the console, puts the shift lever in the path between the two. The automatic shift lever presents a combination of graphics, mechanicals, interfaces and sequences that is less than intuitive at times—just one more reason we'd opt for the manual transmission. The main reason, of course, is that this car is wicked fun to drive, and we'd rather be using both hands and both feet.

The backup camera is good, though fairly bright. The lens hides behind the rear deck's BMW roundel, clever but odd in that it stays open after the car is in park, at least until you power down (which could get Tony Soprano into some trouble).

The 6 Series has evolved and grown to somewhat lose its original shape, a smooth coupe swoop with the interruption of the Chris Bangle-derived bump in the rear. It's more amorphous now, but we are repeatedly struck by the masterful execution of details in the bodywork and interior.

LACKING NOTHING

Our Alpine White over black Nappa leather version had a base price of \$83,000. Add \$3700 for a tech package comprising lane departure, blind spot, parking, side/top cameras and the heads-up display... \$5700 for an M Sport package and 20-inch wheels... \$5500 for two audio system upgrades... \$2000 for roll stabilization... \$500 for heated front seats and \$1500 for leather on the instrument panel, and we have hit \$103,025. You pay for what you get, but you get what you pay for. ■

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BY JOE SAGE

