

THE SUM OF ITS PARTS?



BMW X6 xDRIVE 35i by Barbara and Bill Schaffer

Embarking on a five-day road trip with a 14-year-old and a 16-year-old, it became necessary for us to find a vehicle capable of carrying us all comfortably for a week on the road. Checking the lists of available vehicles in the northwest press fleets, we decided on the BMW X6 xDrive 35i Sport Activity Coupe™.

We wanted to make sure we were well entertained with a fun-to-drive vehicle that could also comfortably carry the four of us and our luggage. With its four-place seating, 25.6 cubic feet of cargo and the 300-hp twin-turbo in-line six-cylinder engine under the hood, the X6 seemed best for the task.

The stylish coupe-like roofline of the X6 and command seating position was great for the first days of our trip. We know we turned some heads as we rumbled into parking lots with the distinctive X6.

SUVs often require climbing up and into for a shorter person, while low-riding cars are harder to get up out of, but the X6's higher seat made getting in and out of the vehicle much easier for Barbara.

The X6 gave a confident and comfortable feeling driving on the narrow winding mountain roads. Our only complaints were that the navigation system could not be programmed while driving, even by the passenger. And the steering, although precise, was heavy and required more effort than we normally like. We did appreciate the excellent backup camera system and Park Distance Control, because the sloping roofline, while good-looking, provides poor rear visibility.

The X6 is the first BMW to get Dynamic Performance Control (DPC), which channels power to an individual rear wheel when more traction is needed, rather than to both wheels as on many other four-wheel drive vehicles. DPC improves steering response, stability and agility.

The X6 comes with a choice of twin-turbo engines. The top model, the xDrive 50i is an awesome, 4.4-liter, 400-hp V-8 (see logbook sidebar). This test vehicle, the xDrive 35i, had the ultra smooth 300-hp in-line, 3.0-liter six-cylinder engine. Even driving all four wheels and nearly 5,000 pounds, the six-cylinder engine accelerates from 0 to 60 mph in just 6.5 seconds and has a top speed of 130 mph. While performance was far better than we needed for the teen tour, it provided that extra kick (and safety) for passing slow-moving vehicles on two-lane roads. Both engines are attached to a six-speed automatic transmission and BMW's unique shifter with wheel-mounted shift paddles.

EPA fuel economy estimates for the 35i are 15 mpg city and 20 mpg highway. We actually averaged 19.7 mpg for the 700 miles of the first half of our trip, and that's probably because Barbara was driving the first few days on local excursions.

The X6 is a beautiful road vehicle, cornering flat, stopping quickly when critters attempted suicide in front of us, riding comfortably and quietly on a variety of road surfaces.

The BMW X6 falls solidly into the premium vehicle

KEEP RIGHT >>

X6 xDRIVE 50i LOGBOOK

PERFORMANCE

- The X6 50i runs up through its gears very fast, hitting five or so in no time at all on a surface street, a very short 2nd but a very long 3rd. Net effect is extremely smooth.
- Power from the 50i's 400 horses is solid from the get-go. But at slower speeds and in turns, it's a little uneven, even lurches.
- We note early that steering seems a lot more solid and sure than most anything else we've driven lately. We later note it does not always track well in its freeway lane, concluding its power and its performance tires work best when used aggressively.
- We continue to love the power when we have the room to use it, very smooth, very nice. But we continue to note an uncomfortable burst in neighborhoods or in tight traffic. It needs a gentle touch at times.
- Dash readout states 17.5 mpg against EPA estimated 12/18 while running around town where we'd expect low efficiency.
- We note the suspension is smooth on speed bumps, even at 25 mph. Usually.

FEATURES

- We like the "joystick" shifter, liked it in the X5 too, but with a hand on it lightly, just waiting to proceed, a little unintended

Logbook (cont'd) >>



category, with prices starting at \$56,725, including destination charge, for the xDrive35i. It's well equipped with a high level of features including leather seating and all the power equipment we expect to find on a premium luxury brand. Our test vehicle added more than \$12,000 in options including a premium audio system, keyless entry and start, and DVD-based voice-activated navigation system. With all the available options, the XDrive 35i tops out at over \$83,000. The xDrive 50i has a base price of \$67,475 and peaks at over \$91,000. A 555-hp X6 M version debuted at the recent New York International Auto Show and should reach US dealers this fall.

There's a lot to like about the X6, but it did have a couple of things that took a little getting used to. For example, the automatic rear liftgate only opens partially, which Bill's head discovered on two occasions. We assume this is to protect it from lifting up and hitting a garage door. We had to learn to push up the door, to avoid the bump.

The X6 still uses the previous generation iDrive to control various vehicle functions including audio, navigation and climate. This system sometimes requires multiple menu choices to achieve the desired result. The new generation recently installed in the new 7 Series sedan is much more intuitive and efficient.

We like the styling, comfortable interior and drivability of the X6. The price is steep, but it's a vehicle that you won't see in every parking lot.

It served us beautifully on our tour.

The X6 offers a fresh and sexy coupe-like styling that sets it apart from almost everything except for the Infiniti FX models. It's well styled and extremely well built, but after a week in the X6, we found our own tastes leaning toward the slightly smaller, but just as roomy, BMW X3 Sport Activity Vehicle. ■

(CONT'D) X6 50i LOGBOOK

pressure can shift it from D to N.

- We find humor in the fact that with an included nav system, the set of printed manuals includes a road atlas.
- The TV screen in back makes our elbow keep thinking the console is open.
- Too many steps at shutdown: foot on the brake, put it in P by squeezing the button on the side and pressing the button on the top, turn radio off, pull up the e-parking brake. Startup is much the same. The backup camera is slow: put it in reverse, generally give up waiting for the screen and just go.

STYLE

- The X6 was greeted by many a critic as the answer to a question nobody asked. We find it hard to shake the thought. Nonetheless, Acura ZDX and others follow suit.
- From 3/4 left rear, with the level-line of the wheel arches and the rising beltline, it has cooler dynamics than overall. They may have missed the styling by just a hair.
- We question the point of having an SUV, which normally has a good practical height but on this has us really duck our neck to just step into, like a low-slung coupe. Once inside, we ask why you want to carry all this hulk and bulk around when you have this relatively tiny greenhouse?
- Passed a Pontiac Aztek. Hmm.
- Behind a tall Lexus GX, we think there may indeed be something about the SUV format from some angles that just begs to have the back lopped off like the X6. —JS

