

Two-door Four By Joe Sage

The big news here is the very existence of the BMW 4 Series, introduced as a concept at the end of 2012 and in the flesh on the 2013 auto show circuit. Despite that exposure, after decades of 3 Series, it still feels new.

Over the past few years, we've had a pretty solid love affair with the 6 Series, a muscular and smooth coupe that never really made us think of any relationship to the 5 Series.

As the 4 Series is now the coupe (and convertible) equivalent of the 3 Series—a concept reinforced by the introduction of a similar 2 Series to accompany (or for now replace) the One, some people may start to think of the Six as a coupe Five. But maybe only to the unlikely degree they might think of an Audi A7 as a coupe A6, or an A5 as a coupe A4.

Conversely, we may likely witness some more evolution, whereby the BMW 4 Series becomes as distinct as the 6 Series has actually seemed all along.

Time may tell.

Lest there be any doubt the 4 Series is its own beast now, it comprises quite a lineup. There are two Coupe models—a four-cylinder 428i (starting at \$40,500) and an inline-six turbo 435i like our test car, with your choice of either an 8-speed automatic (as in this tester) or 6-speed manual (as we would wish). Either engine and/or transmission also comes in an xDrive all-wheel-drive model.

Then there are the 4 Series convertibles—either engine, and with xDrive available on the four-cylinder 428i. Again following suit to the 6 Series, there is a 4 Series Gran Coupé, again with xDrive available on the four-cylinder 428i only. The manual transmission is not offered on the convertibles or Gran Coupé.

By the way, BMW has let slip that this lineup scheme is also in line with the 8 Series.

That does not exist at this time, though some heavy (and gorgeous) hints have hit the European shows as the BMW Pininfarina Gran Lusso Coupé. If you haven't fallen in love with the even-numbered Series yet, that concept will push you directly into the camp.

The 4 Series coupe has grown from its 3 Series predecessor—wider and on a longer wheelbase—but so has the sedan. The coupe is noticeably low-slung, though, partly attributable to its roofline and partly to lowered suspension. It adds up to a great looking car.

The body continues the welcome trend of deBangling its overwrought sheetmetal, smoothing out the sides and cleaning up the rear considerably. Up front, it gets the same grille treatment as the current 3 Series, a sort of slit-mouth affair that connects to the headlights. Dead on, we've been lukewarm on this detail, but from a front side corner, it's strong, giving more punch to the grille opening.

The interior is a knockout, particularly attractive in the Venetian Beige Dakota Leather of our sample, offset by plenty of soft touch black and a bit of attractive walnut.

We were surprised our \$55,000 test sample did not include such fundamentals as sync for its dual climate controls, or a backup camera. To get the rear camera, you need a \$950 package that also includes just one e-feature, park distance control. Ubiquitous cameras are starting to regularly include side and top views, too, but to add that, you add another \$1900 for another package, which also adds lane departure warning. With so many cars now including a very complete array of driver assistance technologies standard, we were surprised. Three grand is excessive for these.

As we hit our first surface street roundabout chicane, we felt more wiggle and wobble than expected. A console switch from normal to Sport (also with Eco or Sport Plus) was most of the cure, although to do it really right, you have to dig deep into the iDrive interface to choose among chassis-plus-drivetrain, just chassis or just drivetrain sport settings. We're confident the engineers came up

with one perfect setup, and this is superfluous.

Much of the above—from the interior to the enhanced suspension—benefitted further from a \$3100 M Sport option. This is three grand well spent (see sidebar). We think this approach (seen also in Audi's S Line and Mercedes-Benz's AMG add-ons) dilutes what a real M buyer has paid for, but it does add a nice degree of M affordably.

A couple of minor but noteworthy beefs show in our logbook notes. We had a tough time keeping the interior cool at times, as temps outside climbed toward 108°. We wish we didn't have to turn the radio off each time we parked. With less than 5000 miles on the odo, we experienced an unusual collection of buzzes and rattles. (Our colleagues may have been hard on it before us, but then so may you be on yours.)

We would gladly give up most of iDrive just for a backup camera. But overall, this is our favorite BMW for quite some time, pricey 6 Series notwithstanding. The back seat even has moderately good legroom, and the trunk is enormous, so even family practicality may not keep you from putting this on your own gotta-have-it list. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	3.0L twin-turbo inline-6
POWER/TORQUE	300 hp / 300 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	8-speed automatic
.....	(6-speed manual available)
DRIVETRAIN	RWD
WEIGHT	3610 lb
MPG.....	22/32/25 (city/hwy/comb)
INCLUDED:	Electronic handling and safety features, high-po lightweight ventilated disc brakes, 18" alloy wheels, auto-leveling xenon headlights, LED accents, 8-way power front seats, walnut trim, AM-FM-CD-MP3-HD audio, bluetooth, iDrive with 6.5" screen and 8 programmable buttons, auto climate, power glass moonroof.
BASE PRICE.....	\$46,000
MELBOURNE RED METALLIC	550
M SPORT OPTION:	M sport suspension, sport seats, M steering wheel, aero kit, exterior trim, interior walnut trim, pearl trim finishers, anthracite headliner
	3100
M SPORT WHEELS:	19" alloy
	900
M SPORT BRAKES	650
DYNAMIC HANDLING PACKAGE:	Variable sport steering
	1000
PREMIUM PACKAGE:	Keyless entry-start, lumbar support, satellite radio
	2200
DESTINATION CHARGE.....	925
TOTAL	\$55,325

LOGBOOK NOTES

Sport mode (which we liked on) sometimes survived a restart, sometimes not. Ditto the auto stop-start setting (we like this off).

Digging in the iDrive interface and manual ultimately revealed most mysteries of simple tasks that will still take interminable steps.

One mystery never solved was the inability to sync both sides' climate to one knob.

Keyless entry failed us many times, whether grabbing or stroking the handle. Audio volume dropped to zero when trying to turn it up. Screen once went blank for no reason.

No rear camera, at \$55k. That's \$950 more.



The new 4 Series makes it clear that four is not just three minus two doors.

