

Trifecta

Three desirable elements add up to one particularly useful 3 Series by Joe Sage

Wagons are immensely popular in Europe, where car enthusiast humans not dissimilar to those in America know their stuff, and they have an almost cultish following here. All-wheel drive is a Le Mans-worthy addition to any performance vehicle and to any vehicle ever tackling slick or loose surfaces. And the BMW 3 Series has long been a yardstick for premium compacts and a focal point in BMW's own broad lineup. Put the three together in one happy package, and you have the BMW 330i xDrive Sports Wagon, with a base price just over \$40,000.

Being a BMW, of course it's not ready at that point, but needs options and packages. Three we consider indispensable (if not for yourself, for resale)—keyless entry, backup camera and nav—as usual are scattered among three complete pack-

ages, totaling \$5400. Heated seats are also hard to do without, all the moreso in a snow country-ready wagon, another \$800. The M Sport and handling packages (along with that Estoril Blue paint, which in fact requires the M Sport Package) round out the car so well, they're almost indispensable in this case, thousands more.

And now you have a \$60,000 car.

There are fully 13 base models in the 3 Series lineup now, with four engines (one is a diesel) and three body styles (sedan, wagon and GT sport-back), before you even get to the 12 other coupes and convertibles now split off as 4 Series. The full price range is only about ten grand among the four-cylinders, fifteen including the six-cylinder 340i. It's easy to see how someone shopping the brand can work through the many forks in the road that lead to a freely willing final decision fully 50 percent more costly than their starting point.

If you take its 3-Series-ness as a given, then a third element of the trifecta is its 2.0L four-cylinder TwinPower turbo, a well-developed little powerplant providing both 248 hp and 33 mpg highway.

BMW makes a splash when they introduce engineering changes or model alternatives, while

most do it for new model years (they don't even produce specifications every year, other than for changes, if any). There's something to be said for this, in a world of endless obsolescence. Thus it's not completely unusual that we received a 2016 328i model just before New Year's Day 2017. Yet, in this case much is changing. The 2017 330i model has all the same fundamentals, even the same pricing, but a new engine (with a good little boost in horsepower, from 240 to 248) and remapped transmission (see sidebar), with higher gear ratios in the acceleration range for more spring in its step (zero-to-60 drops from 6 seconds to 5.7), while lower 7th and 8th gears help this load-capable, distance-loving sports wagon's fuel mileage.

Despite a few eccentricities in its interfaces (see photo captions), the car proved quick, handy and head-turning—and we didn't even crack the surface on its cargo capabilities nor the full range of its all-wheel-drive abilities (that's always a pleasure even around town on pavement, with catlike grip upon acceleration and in the corners). When we get our hands on the new engine and transmission, we just may need to load the thing up and head for a weekend in snow country. ■



(Above) Our BMW 3 Series xDrive Sports Wagon with four 18-inch tires and three 17-inch pizzas has plenty of room left over for cannolis in its 27.5 cu.ft. cargo area (61.5 cu.ft. with the rear seats down). Neat design details abound, such as the recessed bevel around the BMW Roundel up front, or the intricate work in the surround-LED headlights. The shifter is, let's say, tricky: it looks like a normal PRND pattern, but pushing it up toward P actually just pushes it into reverse—P is achieved by pressing a button. You'll get used to this, to a point, but will have to always remind yourself which car you're driving if this is not the only one. The car also punishes you for having your own ideas. It refuses to let you crack your door open in reverse, to make sure your kid or your daisies are not in your path—electronically forcing you back into park. Similarly, you cannot reach over and turn up your climate control fans if it's stuffy (which it often was)—you have to look over, first turn off auto, then go for the fans, too many distracting steps while driving. BMW always pushes packages, for instance here requiring an M Sport Package to get Estoril Blue paint; yet, ironically, if you want sporty Coral Red Dakota leather, they make you remove the M Sport Package. With all these options, it still has a manual tilt/telescope steering wheel.

2016 328i xDRIVE SPORTS WAGON > 2017 330i xDRIVE SPORTS WAGON

ENGINE.....2.0L (1997cc) TwinPower turbo	>	ENGINE.....ALL-NEW 2.0L (1998cc) TwinPower turbo
DRIVETRAIN.....AWD	=	DRIVETRAIN.....AWD
HP/TORQUE.....240 hp / 258 lb-ft	>	HP/TORQUE.....248 hp / 258 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION.....8-spd sport automatic	=	TRANSMISSION.....8-spd sport automatic
GEAR RATIOS.....1: 4.714, 2: 3.143, 3: 2.106, 4: 1.667, 5: 1.285, 6: 1.7, 7: 0.839, 8: 0.667	>	GEAR RATIOS.....1: 5, 2: 3.2, 3: 2.143, 4: 1.72, 5: 1.314, 6: 1, 7: 0.822, 8: 0.64
FINAL DRIVE RATIO.....3.154	>	FINAL DRIVE RATIO.....2.813
0-TO-60 MPH.....6.0 sec	>	0-TO-60 MPH.....5.7 sec
TOP SPEED.....130 mph	>	TOP SPEED.....130 mph
SUSPENSION.....standard 2-link with five front upper anchor points, rear dampers, dynamic stability control; M Sport or Track Handling packages available	=	SUSPENSION.....standard 2-link with five front upper anchor points, rear dampers, dynamic stability control; M Sport or Track Handling packages available
STEERING.....rack & pinion elec power (EPS)	=	STEERING.....rack & pinion elec power (EPS)
WHEELS/TIRES.....17x7.5 / 225/50R17 standard	=	WHEELS/TIRES.....17x7.5 / 225/50R17 standard
LENGTH / WHEELBASE.....182.8 in / 110.6 in	=	LENGTH / WHEELBASE.....182.8 in / 110.6 in
CARGO VOLUME.....27.5 to 61.5 cu.ft	=	CARGO VOLUME.....27.5 to 61.5 cu.ft
TURNING CIRCLE.....38.4 ft	=	TURNING CIRCLE.....38.4 ft
WEIGHT.....3825 lb	>	WEIGHT.....3867 lb
MPG.....22/34/26 (city/hwy/comb)	>	MPG.....23/33/26 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE 2016.....\$42,650	=	BASE PRICE 2017.....\$42,650
ESTORIL BLUE METALLIC.....700	>	ESTORIL BLUE METALLIC.....550
SADDLE BROWN DAKOTA LEATHER.....1450		Other options, packages and destination charge are unchanged in the new 330i as of now.
M SPORT PACKAGE.....3100		

TRACK HANDLING PKG: variable sport steering, M Sport brakes, adaptive M suspension.....2300
STAINLESS STEEL PEDALS.....285
COLD WEATHER PKG: heated steering wheel, heated front and rear seats.....800
DRIVER ASSISTANCE PKG: rear camera, park distance control.....950
DRIVER ASSISTANCE PLUS: active blind spot detection, active driving assistance, side and top cameras.....1700
LIGHTING PKG: AUTO HIGH BEAMS.....800
PREMIUM PKG: keyless entry, lumbar support, satellite radio w/ 1 year.....1700
TECHNOLOGY PKG: navigation, heads-up dis- play, BMW online and apps, advanced real time traffic, remote services.....2750
18" ALLOY WHEEL SPORT W A TIRE.....600
BLACK KIDNEY GRILLES.....230
REAR MANUAL SIDE WINDOW SHADES.....250
ACTIVE CRUISE CONTROL.....1200
ENHANCED BLUETOOTH/SMARTPHONE.....350
HARMAN KARDON SURROUND SOUND.....875

DESTINATION CHARGE.....995
TOTAL 2017 as tested.....\$59,835

