



## BMW returns to form The new 7 Series

Richard Bott reviews the BMW 7 series and finds that style, gadgets and design combine to make a comfortable, luxurious and satisfying drive

### What you need to know...

#### BMW 7 Series

0-62 mph ???

Top speed ???

BHP ???

Torque ???

From ???

**T**he BMW 7 series has always been the luxury car that most tempted owners to sack the chauffeur and do the driving themselves. The Bavarian manufacturer has a reputation for building exceptional driver's cars, and even its limos happily live up to the family reputation. It also traditionally had a well-developed sense of style.

Then along came a chap by the name of Chris Bangle. As the new head of design, Bangle single-handedly changed the face of BMW with radical and very brave new designs of all its best-known models, as well as bringing in a few new ones. Some designs were successful, some took some getting used to and others were a mess. All were a departure from the norm and BMW have to be applauded for that, at least.

A control unit within the system can alert the driver if it detects that a human being has strayed into the car's path – very James Bond



The success of the overall design policy is open to some debate. However, ask anybody used to buying the stylish and iconic 5 Series designs what they thought when presented with the current 5, and you'll get an idea of the controversy that Bangle designs brought. Bangle's 5 was a grower but had no chance of reaching icon status, which was a given with previous incarnations. Many people never got over the shock. Fortunately, the driving experience was still pure Bee Em. Successive designs like the 3 Series have been gradually toned down to the point where they were starting to look like BMWs again; the current 3 Series coupé, for example, is a big step in the right direction.

The first car to receive the Bangle treatment was the 7 Series, which suffered the most for the corporate image change. The sudden design difference seemingly came from nowhere – as unexpected as a bomb drop. The crease line on the side made the car look heavy and ungainly and the boot looked for all the world like it was forgotten about and then drawn on later. Inside was marginally better and the car still drove well – as long as you only got into it in the dark. Image is a major part of the buying process in this sector, and manufacturers mess with that at their peril.

Now though, a BMW that looks as good as it drives appears to be back. The next generation 7 is an elegant, purposeful design and its makers firmly believe that the myriad of innovations in the car also make it the best equipped luxury car in Europe.

As a company, they are justifiably proud of their Efficient Dynamics technology – clever innovations designed to make BMW ownership a less costly experience for owner and planet. All of BMW's current thinking has been poured into the new 7,

which includes extensive use of aluminium for weight reduction and innovative new engines which are more powerful, yet use less fuel and less CO2 – and which switch off when idling in traffic. All models also have BMW's Brake Energy Regeneration system as standard. The idea is to harness the power generated when the car is slowing down, from both the engine on overrun and from the brakes themselves, power which is normally lost to the atmosphere. The car also intelligently switches off the alternator and other ancillaries such as the air-conditioning compressor when the car is accelerating, so that all of the engine's power is used for performance.

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As if all of that's not enough, the interior kit count is equally astonishing, with one of the most luxurious techno fest interiors of any car on the market. The 7 has a veritable feast of switchable, changeable and tuneable features which allow you to utterly alter the characteristics of the car. You can change the way the throttle reacts, alter how the steering feels and vary the speed of changing gear infinitely. You can store up to 100 albums of music on the car's internal, 8GB hard drive, and you can be gently massaged as you ease along the ever-crowded motorways. There is a dedicated concierge service for owners,

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Building on the list of technical marvels, the new 7 Series is the first car in the world to be offered with the option of a side-view camera system. Using cameras mounted in the front bumper and showing on the dashboard screen, the extra vision can be used at obscured junctions, when passing through gateways and so on. Alongside that sits the lane departure and lane change warning systems, the latter of which monitors the blind spots on either side of the car for up to 60 metres, warning the driver if the space is occupied. BMW was the first manufacturer to fit night vision; this has now been upgraded to include pedestrian recognition. A control unit within the system can alert the driver if it detects that a human

to help you to book theatre tickets, arrange flowers for when nothing else will do and, if you actually manage to outwit the plethora of safety systems and crash the thing, it will even call the emergency services.

From a technical viewpoint then, this is an astonishing car and further points the way for BMW's future – lean, green and cutting-edge with a return to its previous iconically stylish self. The new 7 Series arrives on 15 November but at the time of writing, prices have not yet been released. As a long time BMW fan, I am delighted to see them starting to recapture some of their handsome vistas and while still retaining that ultimate driving machine feel, of which they are rightly so proud. ■