



Alpina has tweaked a further 30hp and 18lb ft from its supercharged 4.4-litre V8 for the new B6S; interior looks the business, too

If your daily driver is an E39 M5 it's not all that often that you slip behind the wheel of something that makes you go "Oh my God, that's fast!" But that's just what happened when I introduced the Alpina B6S's throttle pedal to the floor mat. Fast doesn't really cover it though. I've never been strapped into a fighter plane as it heads for the horizon, but I should imagine that this Alpina comes pretty close, although it's a lot more comfortable and stays firmly clamped to the tarmac thanks to Alpina's front and rear Spoilers and rear diffuser. You really do have to carry out a mental recalibration before setting off, and if anything once you hit the 100mph mark you need to hold on a little tighter as it feels ever more ballistic as the speeds rise.

At the heart of the B6S is the familiar supercharged V8 that is also fitted to the B5 and B7, but for the face-lifted Five and Six, Alpina has tweaked the unit to unleash even more power and torque. Hence the 'S' designation. Just about the only thing holding back the original Version of this engine was temperature, or more specifically the heat build up in the cats, which was just shy of melting them at around 1000°C. By tweaking the camshaft overlap, Alpina was able to reduce the

temperature in the cats by around 80°C, which then allowed its engineers to up the power by 30hp and torque by 18lb ft without raising the temperature of the cats any further than it went with the original Version of the engine. Clever stuff.

But there's more to the 'S' than an engine Upgrade. The already excellent gearbox in the B6 has been replaced by an Alpina-tweaked version of BMW's familiar ZF6HP26 TU Sports auto. Alpina worked very closely with ZF to develop bespoke Software for its Switch-Tronic gear change System and as a result changes are creamy smooth, yet lightning fast - as fast as a double clutch System according to Alpina. In practice it works extremely well, too. Leave it in D and the box changes up rapidly to get you into cruising mode. Knock the new-style gear lever to the left to engage 'Sport' mode and it'll hold onto each gear for longer and change even faster. Push the lever forward or back or tweak one of the nodules mounted on the rear of the steering wheel and you've entered Switch-Tronic mode, which allows you to control which gear is engaged and when.

Even in normal mode if you press one of the Switch-Tronic buttons it gives you manual control for a while if a burst of ballistic acceleration is called for,

or if you want to drop down a few cogs for a roundabout or some spirited cornering. Down changes are accompanied by an SMG-style blip of the throttle and to hear the big V8 strut its stuff in this way is pure aural ecstasy. There's something about a whopping great V8 that makes the hairs on the back of your neck rise - yes, the M6's V10 makes a wonderful noise when you're on a charge, but it sounds like a barrel full of bolts rolling down a hill at idle. In contrast, the B6S's V8 sounds sublime from its maniac idle all the way through to a ferocious bellow further up the rev range. It's as if the hungriest, biggest grizzly you've clapped eyes on has just seen Goldilocks making off with his porridge. Yet when you're cruising on the Autobahn it's as docile as a baby grizzly who got home before Goldilocks broke her chair. It is, quite simply, one of the world's great power units. And not chronically thirsty either - a combined economy figure of 23mpg is excellent, and what's more, it really is achievable if you're capable of a bit of self-restraint with the loud pedal.

So it's demonically fast, sounds brilliant and can be surprisingly economical, too, but that's not the end of the B6S's depth of ability. Alpina has also adopted Electronic Damper Control (EDC) on the

RECALIBRATE

your senses

Alpina's not been resting on its laurels with its supercharged V8 monsters: subtle tweaks and revisions have made the ballistic B6S faster than ever

Words: Bob Harper Photography: Dave Smith



SPECIFICATION – ALPINA B6S

ENGINE: V8, 32-valve, supercharged

CAPACITY: 4398cc

MAX POWER: 530hp @ 5500rpm

MAX TORQUE: 535lb ft @ 4750rpm

0-62MPH: 4.5 seconds

TOP SPEED: 198mph

ECONOMY: 23.0mpg

EMISSIONS (CO2): 294g/km

PRICE: TBA



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B6S and again, its engineers weren't content to just use the BMW System that's found on the M6. While the Alpina System uses the same hardware as the M car, its boffins worked closely with Sachs to develop different Software to suit Alpina's needs. Thus there's a 'Normal' program and a 'Sport' setting, but there's no 'Sport Plus' as found on the M machinery. Alpina's settings are initially a tad softer than the two lower BMW settings, but once the car's sensors detect forces of more than 0.45g the later travel of the shock absorbers is actually stiffer than BMW's settings, which leads to excellent body control when pressing on. Yet when cruising on the Autobahn it's remarkably comfortable and supple despite the monster 20-inch 'Dynamic' rims fitted with bespoke

Michelins measuring 255/35 and 285/30 front and rear respectively.

Externally the B6S gains a carbon fibre bonnet with wire-meshed vents, a nod to the previous Alpina top dog, the 8 Series-based B12 5.7. The adoption of carbon fibre was not to do with weight-saving over the front axle (it saves a scant one and a half kilos) but to do with those vents which go a long way to aiding the engine's cooling, particularly in hotter climes. The vents are directly in line with the front of the block and literally suck hot air out of the engine bay. Ironically, the car we drove was a Russian-spec machine which doesn't actually get the carbon fibre item, as they prefer a metal bonnet.

Ultimately it's incredibly hard to find anything not

to like about the B6S. It looks the business, goes like stink, rides and handles with aplomb and has a depth and breadth of ability that can only be found in seriously more expensive machinery. As we went to press Alpina GB was in the process of determining the price for the B6S, and thanks to the Euro/Pound relationship at present, it's likely that it'll be somewhere between the £85-90k mark. It'll be fully loaded though, and if you want to make yours even more exclusive there's a whole host of bespoke paint and trim possibilities, too. If you're considering an M6, an Aston, Maserati et al make sure you give a B6S a whirl - you'll come away with a big smile on your face and more than likely a signature on an order form as well •

