

Super Seven

Alpina's thoroughly reworked BMW's 7 Series to produce a 500bhp fire-breathing monster

Words: Bob Harper Photography: Max Earey



Trundling around the outskirts of Alpina's home town of Buchloe its new 500bhp B7 Bi-Turbo is a paragon of understated smooth-riding cruiser, with just a hint of V8 menace at initial start-up to remind you that this is a very thoroughly reworked machine. On the move with gentle throttle inputs all is as calm and refined as you'd expect from a nigh on £100,000 7 Series. Light the blue touch paper, however, and all hell breaks loose.

Snapper Earey is following in an Alpina B3 Bi-Turbo 3 Series, itself no slouch, but even I'm

astonished by how quickly it turns into a speck in the mirror of the B7. Quick just doesn't cover it. Introduce the loud pedal to the carpet and the two-tonne B7 simply launches itself at the horizon with a ferocity that just shouldn't be possible in such a large machine.

Under the bonnet is a thoroughly reworked version of BMW's 4395cc twin-turbo V8 that delivers its 500bhp at 5500rpm and a healthy 516lb ft of torque from 3000-4750rpm. It also has different pistons, turbos, intercoolers, oil coolers – you name it and the Alpina's setup will be slightly improved

from the BMW on which it is based. It'll crack the 0-62mph sprint in 4.7 seconds on its way to a 174mph electronically limited maximum. Given that the previous generation of Alpina 7 Series also sported 500bhp but was nigh on 100 kilos lighter and yet still it was slower over the 0-62mph dash than this new car it's fair to say that Alpina's being rather conservative with its figures this time around. Perhaps it doesn't want to steal the headlines away from M's version of this engine?

The engine's mated to a ZF six-speed auto 'box (again made to Alpina's spec as none of BMW's



offerings can cope with the torque), that has a standard D mode as well as Sport and 'Switch-Tronic' steering wheel-mounted buttons to swap cogs with. Essentially it's very similar to the one fitted to the old car and changes gear smoothly and very quickly.

The B7 Bi-Turbo's performance shouldn't really come as a surprise – a 750i's rapid and the Alpina has an extra 100bhp to play with – but it's the car's suspension set that really steals the show, equally at home playing comfortable waffer, outside lane 'Bahn stormer or back road blaster depending on your

mood. Like the 750i the B7 comes with Dynamic Damping Control and Dynamic Drive (active roll stabilisation) but the systems have been completely recalibrated to suit Alpina's requirements.

There are hardware changes too, with shorter and uniquely calibrated springs made by Eibach to Alpina's spec, lowering the front and rear of the car by 15 and 10mm respectively. Camber, castor, and suspension geometry are all different for the B7 and in combination with non-run-flat Michelins the Alpina not only grips exceedingly well but it rides significantly better than the standard BMW 7 Series.

This despite the monster 21-inch diameter rims clothed in 245/35 and 285/30 rubber front and rear.

Externally there are plenty of clues that this isn't a regular 7 Series, but the front and rear spoilers aren't just for show – they've been fully wind tunnel tested to direct cooling air to the V8 and to reduce lift by 30 and 15 per cent front and rear. Inside it's as sumptuous as you'd expect from a machine costing nigh-on £100k. Blue-faced dials with red needles, a smattering of B7 and Alpina logos here and there – it all helps to give the interior a lift over the standard Seven. We're not 100 per cent

THE SPEC SHEET: BMW ALPINA B7 BI-TURBO

ENGINE >> V8, 32-valve, petrol, twin-turbo CAPACITY >> 4395cc MAX POWER >> 500bhp @ 5500rpm MAX TORQUE >> 516lb ft @ 3000-4750rpm 0-62mph >> 4.7 seconds TOP SPEED >> 174mph (limited) WEIGHT >> 2040kg FUEL CONSUMPTION >> 23.7mpg CO2 >> 286g/km PRICE >> £95,900

WE LIKE >> Monster V8's power, excellent ride/handling balance

WE DISLIKE >> Size, slight steering vagueness

VERDICT >> Genuinely fast and entertaining – the best 7 Series yet





convinced by the Myrtle wood trim, but it's easy enough to opt for a different finish when ordering.


Pictures in the bag we can finally head for Buchloe and in typical fashion we're running late. If we're to catch our plane home we're going to have to get a wriggle on. The V8 gurgles and burbles in anticipation as I dial in Sport mode on the Dynamic Damping Control, shift the gear lever over to engage Switch-Tronic and point the B7's nose northwards. Early evening traffic has thinned and we're fortunate enough to be travelling up a road that's blocked by road works further south and thanks to a lengthy diversion it's virtually deserted. Once again the B3 behind me rapidly retreats in my rear view mirror as the mighty V8 hauls the B7 forward. No matter what speed or what gear you're in with this thing, forward momentum is nothing short of astonishing. The red needles on the dials are a blur as both the rev counter and speedo travel their arcs. Each time the redline's reached a simple tweak on the right hand button sees another cog seamlessly engaged.

Opting for the Sport Plus setting allows for some more slip from the rear wheels before the traction control intervenes and at low speeds the DSC tell-tale flashes demonically as you apply the power. Turn-in is impressive given the weight and speed while grip's phenomenal from the gumball Michelins, while in Sport Plus the well-weighted steering gives more feedback than when in Normal mode. It's still a little on the light side around the straight ahead and does suffer from an occasional kickback when you encounter a particularly rough stretch of road or a bumpy corner but as far as downsides are concerned that's about it.

The huge discs (374mm front and 370mm rear), which were developed for a 760Li with all the options fitted, wash off speed with ease and a well modulated pedal gives you huge confidence in the anchors. The suspension helps here too – as each axle is independently controlled the shocks at the front will stiffen considerably during heavy braking while the ones at the rear slacken off to give more control to the rear wheels.

As we join a more heavily trafficked highway the B7 makes light work of picking off slower cars – drop a cog if you like with the Switch-Tronic, or simply floor it and let the torque do the work. It's hard to think of many machines that could keep pace. And all the time the bespoke Boysen exhaust (again made to Alpina's exacting specifications) and the V8 are playing a veritable symphony, ranging from a deep, bassy rumble to a higher pitched screaming banshee. It's in no way intrusive, and some might say not audible enough, but it always sounds cultured and absolutely unburstable.

As we say our goodbyes at Alpina and get into our A-Class hire car it feels as if someone's replaced its engine with a sewing machine. As we drive away the B7 sits gently ticking as hot brakes and exhausts cool down. I can't help but think that the it is one of Alpina's finest achievements.

The 750i is an awesome piece of kit in standard form, but Alpina has taken it to a whole new level with the B7. And here's a thought: this engine will be heading its way under the bonnet of the next generation B5 and B6 over the next couple of years. If it's this impressive hauling over two-tonnes around what's it going to be like in the lighter 5 and 6 Series shells? We can't wait to find out 

Monster twin-turbo V8 offers serious pace, despite two-tonne kerb weight. Interior has a luxury feel

