

Put your foot to the floor, clench butt cheeks and prepare to grin



BMW Alpina B3 BiTurbo

## Born to be different

I AM NOT A NUMBER. I AM AN ALPINA. IT MAY SHARE SOME SIMILARITIES WITH THE M3 SAYS PETER GRUNERT, BUT EXCLUSIVITY IS THE B3'S RAISON D'ÊTRE

IN A WORLD WHERE FORTY million Americans were recently revealed to have at least one tattoo adorning their bodies, individuality is everything. Given such a desire for differentiation, the thought that even the latest V8-propelled, £50k-plus BMW M3 could soon prove to be too common is a perfectly excusable one, a concern that also justifies this BMW Alpina B3 BiTurbo's existence.

On first impressions there are conspicuous similarities between the obscure Alpina and BMW's own über-coupe. Each takes a regular 3-Series as its starting point. Each messes with the chassis, engine, bodywork and interior. Each also offers levels of acceleration that promise to wrench organs, tighten butt cheeks and plaster a permanent rictus grin across their drivers' faces.

And that's where the similarities begin to fade. The Alpina takes the three-litre straight six from the already confusingly-titled 335i as the starting point for its engine, in place of the M3's heavier four-litre V8. The Upgrades are relatively straightforward: boost pressure for the sequential twin turbos has been dialled up to 1.1 bar, with toughened Mahle pistons bolted

inside to cope with the extra strain. The raw stats suggest 355bhp next to the M3's 414bhp and 369lb ft of torque in place of the M3's comparatively meagre 295lb ft, while reality reveals a car that is bruisingly, ceaselessly quick without nearly so much high-rewing effort needing to be invested by its driver. 0-62mph passes in the exact same 4.8 seconds as the M3, while - for the record - removing the restrictor results in a top speed 22mph higher than an M3 is allowed to manage. And yet, on average, the B3 gets you 6.3 miles further on every gallon.

This is a far easier car to live with, a fact compounded by the use of a six-speed auto box in place of the M3's six-speed manual and stiff clutch. The B3 features steering

wheel mounted buttons to leave an element of driver control, their shifts reprogrammed to respond even faster than in an equivalent auto-optioned 335i. The use of a chassis spec similar to a 335i Sport, but with the run-flat tyres ditched, provides a ride more supple, if ultimately less edgy, than an M3's.

In the incestuous worlds of BMW and Alpina, the mechanical mods are all assembled on BMW's regular 3-Series production line while Alpina only adds the bodykit and the bizarre (thankfully optional) twin-toned, diamond-patterned Deutschland of Leather inside afterwards. Right there is the only point at which well-informed exclusivity takes a step back, and discretion exits the building.



Smart Alpina bodykit; bizarre Alpina interior thankfully optional



Bimmer badge, Alpina exclusivity



Responds faster than a speeding 335i



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We say: Barely 100 B3s are due to come to the UK each year. Better suited to most roads than an M3 and £5k cheaper too.

**Price:** £45,250  
**On your drive for:** £1116pcm  
**Performance:** 0-62mph in 4.8 secs  
 177mph max speed, 29.1mpg  
**Tech:** 2979cc 6cyl. RWD. 355bhp.  
 369lb ft, 1560kg, 232g/km CO<sub>2</sub>

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