

One thing I've always noticed about BMWs through the years is that when pushed hard on either racetrack or lonely winding roads, they enter a world of their own. There's a certain something built into every BMW that always brings me to the same conclusion: the harder you push 'em, the better they feel.

The newer Chris Bangle designs, though, have been controversial, due to somewhat conflicting lines and themes. That said, the 645 is far and away the most beautiful BMW in the present lineup. Stunning and a bit menacing from the front, its overall look is sleek, serious, muscular and upscale. Even the lines separating trunk and rear quarter panels that appear awkward in the 7-Series have somehow meshed nicely in the 645.

But that's not why you're here. You want to know how it goes.

With a 4.8L 325 horsepower V8, sticky 245/45x18 tires and a slick 6-speed automatic with Steptronic control, the 645 goes quite nicely, thank you. Six-speed stick and SMG transmissions are also available. At around 4,300 pounds, it's not sports car nimble. But it *is* a magnificent *Gran Turismo* machine born into the *Autobahn* tradition of covering lots of territory in a short time. *Precise* seems the best term to describe its steering and handling. Its suspension is quite firm, but not harsh. When pushed to the limit on sharply winding pavement, it exhibits little body roll and feels rock solid right up to tire squeal time. Driven calmly around town, you'd never know how great a machine this is.

Inside, you'll find high quality materials throughout, with comfortable, well bolstered seats that hold you in place when attacking those winding roads. There is scant rear seat legroom however. Lowering the top is a one button affair—just push and hold. When lowered, the top is hidden to maintain the smooth look.

Moving from sleek GT to more practical four-door, the 5-Series sedan offers you considerable variety. First, choose your horsepower:



PHOTO BY MICHAEL COONEY

BMW 645Ci Convertible and 530i Sedan

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215 or 255 (6-cylinders), 360 (V8) or 500 (V10), and three different 6-speed manual and automatic transmissions (7-speed with the V10). My favorite of the bunch is the one I drove—the 3.0L 255 hp six with 6-speed Steptronic auto.

Big power is fun, of course, but



BMW's inline-6 engines are turbine smooth and 255 horsepower provides plenty of punch. It is also more real-world thrifty than the V8.

Exterior design on the 5-Series is more heavily styled than before, with a distinctly curved nose and high, flat rear deck with wraparound taillights.

Inside, the 530 shines with comfortable seating, excellent ergonomics and quiet refinement. Rear seat legroom is quite generous. Add in a tilt/tele steering wheel plus every-which-way seat adjustment with memory, and practically anyone

should find a perfect driving position.

My unit had the sport package including run-flat tires, sport seats and firmer suspension. The resulting ride is a bit stiffer but handling on those winding roads is superb. This is one sedan that responds with precision and keeps you feeling in total control even when pushing it hard through the corners.

For 2006, the 645 becomes the 650 with a larger 4.8L V8 and 360 hp. The 2005 645ci reviewed here carried a "loaded" price tag of \$83,670 including destination. For this 2006 530i the tag totaled \$54,965. The 645Ci is EPA rated at 18-city, 26-highway mpg, and I averaged 18 mpg. The new 530i is EPA rated at 21-city, 29-highway mpg, and my average came to 21.5 mpg. Both were driven in city traffic, on freeways and on my favorite winding roads.

BMW makes a wide variety of sedans, coupes and sports cars. These two examples both do the nameplate proud, and continue BMW's tradition of producing outstanding driver's cars. 

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