



Understeer is rarely present in the M535i...

BMW M535i

The best yet from Bavaria?

THE BMW M535i follows a classic recipe for performance. Take the biggest engine in production then fit it into the smallest body shell feasible. The idea to produce an utterly refined up market car came from now departed competitions director Jochen Neerpasch who was in no doubt as to the performance

potential of a car using mechanical components belonging to the 140 mph 635Ci but in a bodyshell weighing some 150lb less. The prefix M stands for Motorsport division where final setting-up and testing take place before delivery.

The engine is identical to that used in the 735i and 635Ci (not to be confused with the smaller bore 3.2-litre unit). In dry sump form the same siamesed block is also employed for the 24 valve 3.5-litre engine that powers the M1. Bore and stroke measurements of the single ohc unit are 93.4x84mm to give a displacement of 3,453 c.c. On a 9:3 to 1 compression ratio and L-Jetronic fuel injection maximum power and torque are 218 bhp (DIN) at 5,200, and 224 lb. ft. at 4,000 rpm.

Whereas normal production 5 series cars are available with

four- or five-speed "overdrive" Getrag transmissions BMW have opted on the M535i to offer only the "sports" five-speed with direct top as fitted to the 635Ci. On a 3.07 final drive (again identical to the 635Ci) overall gearing is 23.5 mph per 1,000 rpm. Other parts common to the 635Ci are its 14 x 6½in. wide BBS/Mahle cast alloy wheels, 195/70VR Michelin XWX tyres, and all round vented discs.

Outwardly the main distinguishing features are its deep glass-fibre moulded front spoiler (vented to provide airflow to the brakes and oil cooler) and rear

moulded rubber boot lid spoiler, both vital to achieve the necessary high-speed aerodynamic stability and balance. Underneath the skin suspension modifications include stiffer 528i "sportwagen" springs, harder damping (Bilstein) also stronger anti-roll bars front and rear measuring 24 and 18mm dia respectively. Inside there is a pair of high backed semi rally type seats and a smaller than standard flat Motorsport steering wheel.

When comparing weights the 535i's *raison d'être* is confirmed. It tips the scales at 29.5cwt (distributed 55/44 front to rear) compared with our Autotest 635i's 30.8cwt. The saving is at least 140lb.

BMW M535i

UK appearance of four-cylinder 1,990 c.c. 520 in February 1973. December '73 saw introduction of carburettor 2,494 c.c. six cylinder 525. January '75 the 1,766 c.c. 518. April '75 the fuel injected 2,788 c.c. 528i and October '77 the 1,990 c.c. six-cylinder 520. The Motorsport conceived and "fettled" M535i was launched in Bavaria in March this year. In suspension, brakes and mechanics it has much in common with the 635Ci Coupé.

PRODUCED BY:

Bayerische Motoren Werke AG
Munich
West Germany

SOLD IN UK BY:

BMW (GB) Ltd
Ellesfield Avenue
Bracknell
Berks. RG12 4TA

Performance

Indecently fast

Starting is typical of L-Jetronic engines. With no throttle applied the engine fires almost immediately the key is turned and then settles down to an even tickover with that familiar BMW 'twitter' from the exhaust. Warm-up is comediably fast. There is not the slightest suggestion of flat spotting or sluggishness, while the engine is reaching working temperature.

It is the smooth and totally fuss-free manner so typical of a BMW straight six that never fails to please. The car will trickle through traffic in top, then with under 1,000 rpm indicated pull away without a snatch or shudder. With 2,000 rpm showing it is getting into its stride hauling the car more rapidly forward, progress that seems not to diminish until well over 120 mph. The engine revs eagerly past peak power and on to the rev limiter (set at 6,200 rpm on the test car). Its beautifully pro-

formance of this measure makes it a most effortless car to drive fast. Acceleration response is superbly acute. Once the engine is in the working range — say above 2,500 rpm — down-changes are rarely needed to give adequate overtaking performance.

At 6,200 rpm, maxima in the gears are 39, 61, 82 and 116 mph — speeds that will vary slightly due to rev limiter tolerance. Using the car to the full one occasionally feels the need for a higher third. An 1,800 rpm rev drop occurs on the upchange to fourth yet there is only a 1,600 rpm gap between second and third. Ideally the reverse would be better, to preserve the otherwise progressive reduction in rev drops towards top. On the "sports" gearbox first gear is offset (whereas the "overdrive" boxes have a more conventional offset fifth). The first to second change is slow (making the 0-60 mph time even more remarkable) and a little indistinct. Once working in the normal H-pattern, change quality is accurate enough, but

should be an easily attainable average in normal use. The tank holds 15.5 gallons. On the test car the fuel warning light started flashing after covering between 210 and 230 miles leaving a comfortable four gallon reserve — and time to find a convenient filling station. Brimming is fast. The filler accepts full pump flow until attempts are made to squeeze in the last half gallon which has to be added slowly if blow backs are to be avoided. A nice point (on all BMWs) is a filler cap carrier mounted on the inside of the filler flap.

Noise

Mainly most pleasing ones

As mentioned the M535i will burble along with the town traffic, barely revving above tick-over. On full throttle an induction chatter (well muted) signifies that the engine is beginning to get into its stride, and as the revs rise this blends into a delightful song. On cruising power settings mechanical noise

Road Behaviour

Secure ride

The M535i's power-assisted ZF recirculating ball steering is pleasing not only for its total absence of kickback but for its sensible gearing (3.5 turns), near perfect weighting and good feel (though this does not match the best rack and pinion systems). The car also has a reasonably tight 34ft turning circle.

Clearly BMW have chosen suspension settings for the M535i that equate closely to those for the 635Csi. It has much of that car's feel and virtually none of the more prosaic 5 Series model's tendency to pitch, and corkscrew when cornered or braked hard. This very fact leads to a secure yet comfortable ride. The suspension is firm yet supple enough to cushion the occupants from most sharp surface changes, though some vertical shaking was occasionally encountered over badly rippled B roads. Longer undulations and more



A deep front spoiler enhances the BMW's leaned forward grille frontal aspect. Alloy wheels are by BBS/Mahle. Rubber faced bumping and side strips are standard 5 series. A moulded rubber boot spoiler distinguishes the car from the rear



gressive torque and power curves are illustrated by the evenness of the 20 mph acceleration increments in any gear. In top they are within a second of each other from 20 mph right through to 110 — and from 10 mph to 100 mph in fourth. And as predicted by BMW the M535i is appreciably faster than the 635Csi (admittedly figured in less favourable conditions) everywhere and only marginally slower in top speed. 30-50 mph in third, 50-70 mph in fourth and 70-90 mph in fifth took 3.8, 6.0 and 8.7sec against 635Csi's 4.3, 6.7 and 10.0sec. The M535i took 13.8sec to accelerate from 100-120 mph in top carving some 4.2sec off the time achieved by our road test 635Csi (*Autocar*, 6 Jan, 1979).

Standing start acceleration is equally impressive. The limited slip differential gives superb traction off the line. Dropping the clutch with 4,500 rpm produced just the right amount of wheelspin, two black lines on the tarmac and 0-30 mph in 2.5sec. Thereafter the M535i stormed to 60, 100 and 120 in 7.1, 19.2 and 32.3sec respectively (635Csi 8.5, 23.4 and 41.0sec). For a "family" car the M535i is indecently fast. Perfor-

rather rubbery.

The M535i displays a degree of undergearing typical of many German cars where the ultimate in speed (and economy) have been sacrificed for top gear performance. We achieved a mean maximum of 139 mph (1 mph less than the 635Csi and well up to BMW's claimed 136 mph plus) with the engine revving at 5,900 rpm — some 600 rpm over peak power. Yet because of its turbine like smoothness the engine never feels stressed. Our testing was conducted in Germany where road conditions permitted quite natural cruising between 100 and 120 mph.

Economy

Not what you'd expect

Engine efficiency has always been a BMW strong point. In comparing the M535i's 20.2 mpg overall with our 635Csi 17.5 mpg, the suggestion is that light weight may have a greater bearing on economy than aerodynamic efficiency. For most of the test mileage the M535i was driven hard and rarely cruised below 90mph. On one long cross-country trip we saw nearly 22 mpg which

dies away except at around 4,000 rpm (95 mph) where a slight engine/body resonance makes its presence heard rather than felt. When cruising above 100 mph engine noise fades once more to be replaced by steadily increasing wind noise from around the screen areas as the most evident sound. Normal conversation is quite possible up to 100 mph, but needs slightly raised voices over 120 mph.

The M535i is particularly well-insulated from road noise. With VR rated tyres fitted some low speed bump thump over damaged road surfaces or potholes is to be expected, but it is always muted. At high speed coarse surfaces create some tyre roar but not to an intrusive degree. Paradoxically, we noticed that a marked howl emanated from the tyres at precisely 40 mph. At 45 mph it disappeared. While by no means quiet by Jaguar standards, it is the M535i's complete absence of engine or driveline vibration that adds to a feeling of overall refinement.



typical B road surface irregularities are absorbed beautifully. Pitch and roll are controlled sufficiently to inspire confidence without being so limited as to take away the driver's feel of the build up in braking and cornering forces.

On well surfaced roads straight line stability is excellent. Quite strong cross winds barely affect the car until travelling at over 120 m.p.h. However, driven fast on bumpy and cambered straights where suspension

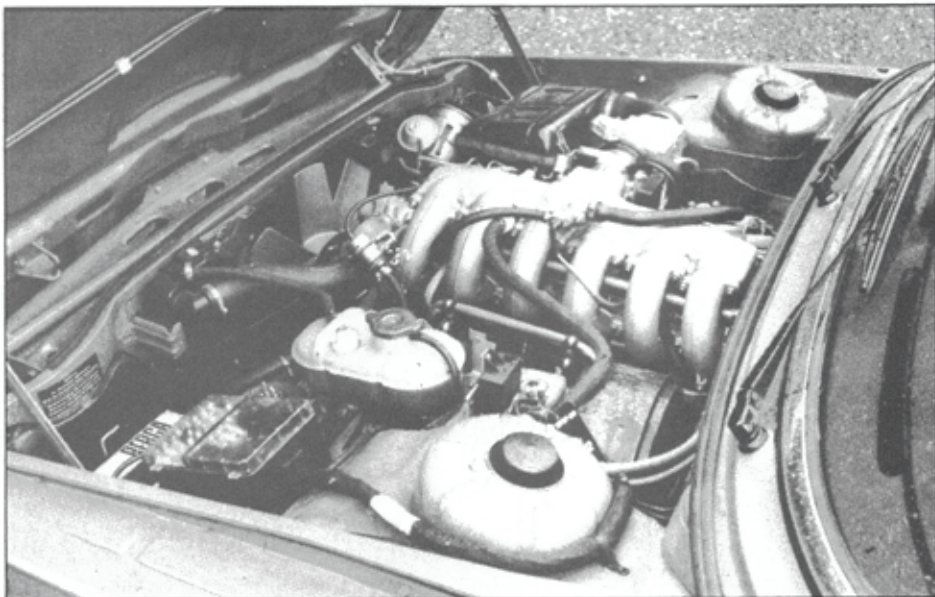
A handsome car beside one of Bavaria's most beautiful and extraordinarily silent lakes. The thin screen pillaring is emphasised. Wide slots in the spoiler carry air to the oil cooling radiator, and direct it towards the brakes



movement is large the car would "walk" about slightly and thus require constant small steering corrections to keep it running straight. It should be emphasized that the car does not feel unstable in these conditions but its accurate placing requires concentration.

Motorsport appear to have struck just the right balance in matching the 5-series chassis to a large power increase. On dry roads the adhesion limit is excellent. The car responds keenly to the steering. There is no tugging the M535i into bends. Understeer is never present except perhaps on the entry to a hairpin bend, yet we have always felt all BMWs could do with some to give the driver more idea of the degree of latent adhesion available — especially in the wet.

Pressed hard through long fast corners the front and rear tyres commence squealing together as if to emphasise the car's neutral balance. In easing off the throttle when hurrying through bends one feels some uneasiness from the rear, and an abrupt lift-off while cornering in extremis causes the quite sharp rear end breakaway so characteristic of BMWs — especially in the wet. This is in spite of the limited slip differential which offers such tenacious rear end bite out of wet surfaced corners. The trade off here being that when too much throttle is used rear end breakaway is not cus-



hioned (as it is normally) by a spinning inside rear wheel.

The brakes worked admirably during the fade test, coping easily with 10 consecutive 0.5g stops from 90 mph (the speed at the ¼-mile). After an initial rise pedal pressures stabilized at a consistently moderate level. Where the 535i's brakes do come in for criticism is in their excessively sharp response. A 10lb pedal load produced 0.25g retardation — the typical check

stop — while a mere 30lb (or just half what most cars require for a crash stop) saw our decelerometer record the best crash stop of 0.95g. With a 40lb pressure the front brakes locked hard on. Quite apart from the probability of locking-up during panic braking, such light pedal efforts are likely to lead to annoyingly uneven braking when using the brake pedal as a pivot during heel and toe brake and throttle operation. The hand-

brake coped well with a 1-in-3 test slope, and managed a tolerably good 0.3g stop on the flat.

Behind the wheel

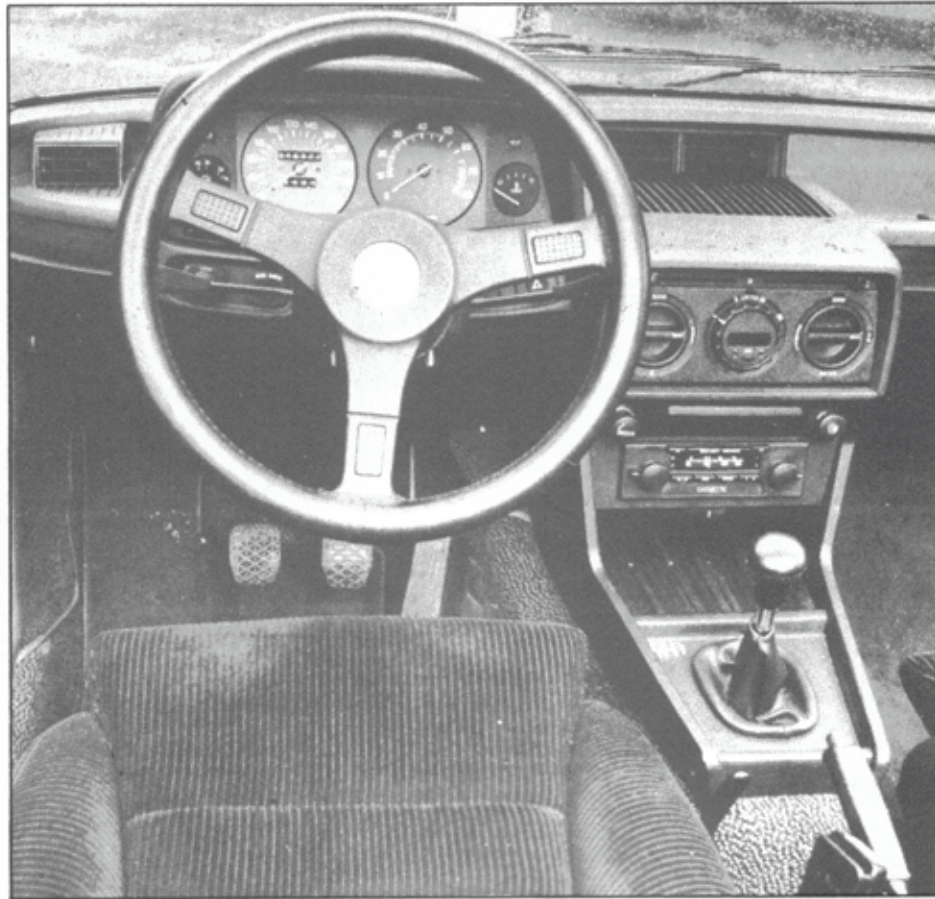
Utterly straightforward

Inside, the M535i's main distinguishing feature is its superb high backed cloth covered and side bolstered semi-rally type seats: They have a huge range of fore and aft adjustment, and a ratchet type backrest movement. In addition the flat and slightly smaller than standard leatherbound Motorsport steering wheel is adjustable for reach. There should be little reason for discomfort.

The pedals are perfectly arranged for heel and toe operation. The instruments are housed in a hooded binnacle, and are plainly visible through the steering wheel. As we have consistently pointed out they are a model of simplicity and clarity. A 150 mph speedometer (with press to reset mileage trip) and 0-8,000 rpm revcounter (redlined at 6,400) are flanked by water temperature and fuel contents gauges. Disappointingly in a car of this class there is no oil pressure gauge or ammeter. Warning lights deal with these functions plus rear fog lights, handbrake, indicators and main beam. The push/pull main light and press button rear fog light switches are placed conveniently on the fascia to the left of the steering column, with the hazard warning light switch opposite.

Thumb presses set in the steering wheel spokes operate the horn. We found them rather too close to the rim, and lost count of the times they were pressed inadvertently. Minor controls are crisp in use. The left hand stalk operates indicators, headlamp flash, dip and main beam, while the right hand one

Instruments from left are fuel gauge, speedometer (with press to re-set trip), revcounter, and water temperature gauge. Behind the flat Motorsport steering wheel (note horn thumb presses) column stalks operate indicators / headlamp flash on left, and wipers on the right. Centre console houses heater controls, cigar lighter, ashtray, and radio. The main light switch (push pull type) and hazard warning knob are placed beneath instrument panel on fascia. Pedal positioning is excellent





The M535i's semi-rally type seats are superbly comfortable, though when pushed back fully (they are forward here) rear leg room is restricted. Cord upholstery of high quality is used throughout. The carpeted boot is generous, has useful corner pockets, and is illuminated. The tool kit is neatly contained in a drop down tray fixed to the boot lid.

works two speed plus intermittent action wipers, and presses at the end for screen wash and flick wipe.

Existing BMW owners will be entirely familiar with the heater controls mounted in the centre console. The outer dials control temperature and flow direction. Between these is the usual ring type fan rheostat (now with digital instead of analogue clock inset). Two horizontal sliders dictate whether the system draws in outside air or recirculates that within. Set in the fresh air mode, the system provides a good blast through four fascia outlets though not without fan assistance to maintain flow at low speeds. Directional control and heat output are satisfactory, however once again we have to mention the poor temperature control offered by BMW's water-valve heater. This leads to constant fiddling in trying to "chase" the desired heat output.

One of the strongest features of the 5 series and the M535i in particular is its commanding driving position. All round visibility is first class, the squared off bonnet line making it a particularly easy car to judge widths in.

Living with the M535i

Owning a practical family car with more performance than is available in many a grand tourer will be rewarding experience, especially so as apart from the nicely finished aerodynamic add-ons, there is little to distinguish this from any other up market 5-series BMW. The driving seat must come in for a special mention. It gave tired testers complete support during long periods at the wheel.

Oddsments space is tolerably good, with a lipped fascia top,



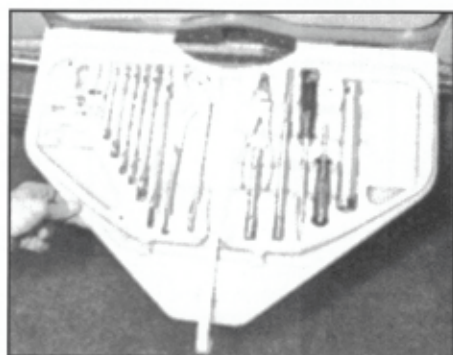
generous door bins, a small tray in the centre console, and the usual drop down glovebox on the passenger's side which contains, at one side, a little torch that is automatically recharged from the car's electrical system. Other pleasing details are the automatic boot light, and comprehensive tool kit contained within a drop down tray in the boot lid. The jack, warning triangle, and a first aid kit are clipped to the boot side. The spare wheel is housed under the carpeted boot floor.

The standard specification includes tinted glass, electrically operated door mirrors and central door-locking, the latter only working from the driver's door key or catch. The test car was also fitted with a most satisfactory and worthwhile Webasto sliding and tipping sunshine roof.

Crammed as it is with engine and ancillaries, the M535i's engine bay presents a neat and pleasingly purposeful sight. Owners are unlikely to delve any deeper than undertake normal fluid level checks which are straightforward. Otherwise servicing follows normal BMW practice; there is an oil change every 5,000 miles and more major attention required at 10,000-mile intervals.

The 5 series range

Motorsport's intention is to produce 1,200 M535i models yearly. GB sales start in October and the price will be £13,745. Normal production models remain the 528i (£10,595), 525 (9,325), 520 (£8,150) and 518 (£6,958). Five-speed over-



drive gearboxes are available on all models (£577 extra on 528i and 525, £515 and £274 more on the 520 and 518 respectively). "Sports" five-speed gearboxes can also be had for an additional £230 on all but the 518.

The jack, wheelbrace, warning triangle, and first aid kit are housed in the nearside boot pocket

HOW THE BMW M535i PERFORMS



Figures taken at 6.242 miles by our own staff on the Continent

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TEST CONDITIONS:

Wind: 0-5 mph
Temperature: 20 deg C (68 deg F)
Barometer: 29.5 in. Hg (1,000 mbar)
Humidity: 70 per cent
Surface: dry asphalt and concrete
Test distance: 859 miles

MAXIMUM SPEEDS

Gear	mph	kph	rpm
Top (mean)	139	224	5,900
Top (best)	140	225	5,950
4th	116	187	6,200
3rd	82	132	6,200
2nd	61	98	6,200
1st	39	63	6,200

ACCELERATION

	True mph	Time (sec)	Speedo mph		
FROM REST	30	2.4	29		
	40	3.5	39		
	50	5.3	50		
	60	7.1	60		
	70	9.2	70		
	80	11.9	81		
	90	15.7	89		
	100	19.2	100		
	110	24.5	111		
	120	32.2	120		
	130	44.3	131		
Standing 1/4-mile: 15.7 sec, 90 mph Standing km: 28.4 sec, 115 mph					
IN EACH GEAR	10-30	—	6.8	4.6	3.0
	20-40	8.1	6.6	4.2	2.9
	30-50	8.3	6.1	3.8	2.8
	40-60	8.1	6.1	3.7	3.1
	50-70	8.0	6.0	3.9	—
	60-80	8.4	6.0	4.6	—
	70-90	8.7	6.3	—	—
	80-100	9.0	6.7	—	—
	90-110	8.9	6.3	—	—
	100-120	13.8	—	—	—
	110-130	17.3	—	—	—

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Overall mpg: 20.2 (14.1 litres/100km)

Constant speed:
Autocar constant speed fuel measuring equipment incompatible with Bosch L Jetronic fuel injection

Autocar formula: Hard 18.2 mpg
Driving Average 22.2 mpg
and conditions Gentle 26.3 mpg

Grade of fuel: Premium, 4-star (98 RM)
Fuel tank: 15.5 imp. galls (70 litres)
Mileage recorder: 1.7 per cent long

(ECE A70 fuel consumption figures not necessarily related to Autocar figures)

Urban cycle: 14.7 mpg
Steady 56 mph: 33.1 mpg
Steady 75 mph: 26.6 mpg

OIL CONSUMPTION

(SAE 20/50) Negligible

BRAKING

Fade (from 90 mph in neutral)

Pedal load for 0.5g stops in lb

start/end	start/end
1 20/16	6 24/48
2 20/40	7 28/42
3 22/60	8 28/44
4 22/100	9 36/40
5 24/60	10 32/36

Response (from 30 mph in neutral)

Load	g	Distance
10 lb	0.25	120 ft
20 lb	0.55	55 ft
30 lb	0.95	32 ft
Handbrake	0.30	100 ft

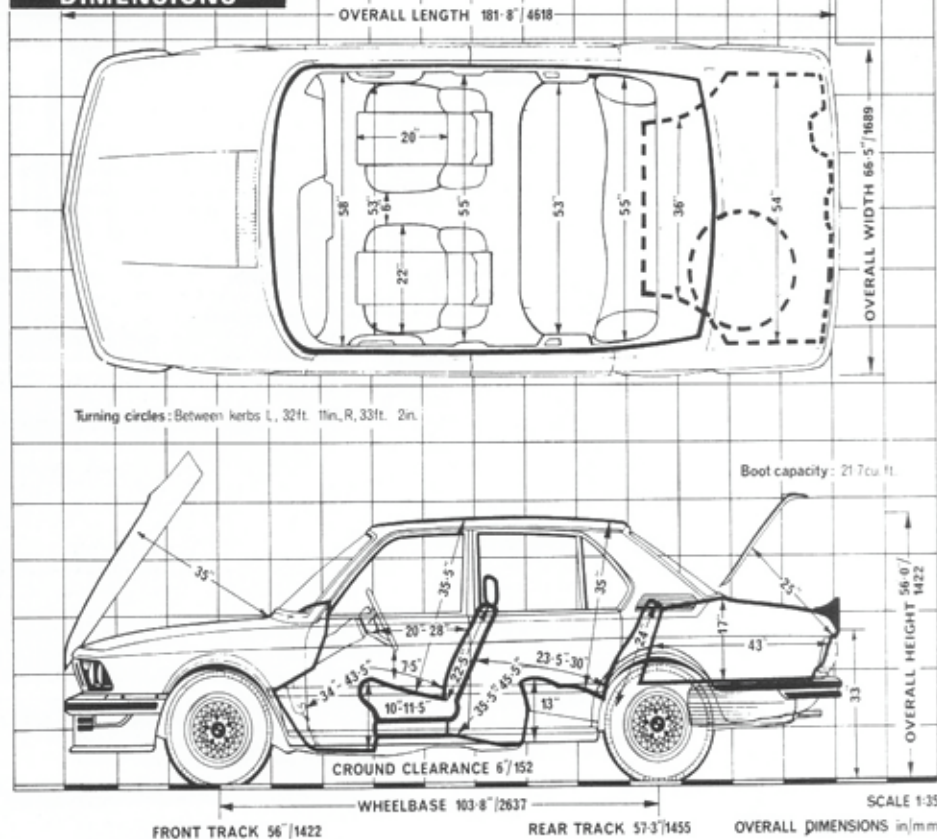
Max. gradient: 1 in 3

CLUTCH Pedal 35 lb; Travel 5 in.

WEIGHT

Kerb. 29.5 cwt/3,305 lb/1,501 kg
(Distribution F/R, 55/45)
Test. 33.5 cwt/3,750 lb/1,703 kg
Max. payload 970 lb/440 kg

DIMENSIONS



PRICES

Basic	£11,032.77
Special Car Tax	£919.40
VAT	£1,792.80
Total (in GB)	£13,744.97
Seat Belts	Incl.
Licence	£60.00
Delivery charge (London)	£80.00
Number plates	£10.00
Total on the Road	£13,894.97

(exc. insurance)
EXTRAS (inc. VAT)
*Sunshine roof (manual) £410.55
Sunshine roof (electric) £566.95
*Radio/cassette player
£120.00 (approx)
Air conditioning £1,130.00
*Fitted to test car

TOTAL AS TESTED ON THE ROAD £14,425.52

Insurance Group 7/On application

SERVICE & PARTS

	Interval
Change	5,000 10,000 20,000
Engine oil	Yes Yes Yes
Oil filter	Yes Yes Yes
Gearbox oil	— — Yes
Spark plugs	— Yes Yes
Air cleaner	— Yes Yes

Total cost
(Assuming labour at £11.50/hour inc. VAT)

PARTS COST (including VAT)	
Brake pads (2 wheels)—front	£19.70
Brake pads (2 wheels)—rear	£11.69
Exhaust complete	£181.02
Tyre — each (typical)	£102.92
Windscreens (tinted and laminated)	£79.53
Headlamp unit	£17.48
Front wing	£84.00
Rear bumper (3 sections)	£109.67

WARRANTY

12 months/unlimited mileage

SPECIFICATION

ENGINE	
Head/block	Front, rear drive Alloy/cast iron
Cylinders	6
Main bearings	7
Cooling	Water
Fan	Viscous
Bore, mm (in.)	93.4 (3.68)
Stroke, mm (in.)	84.0 (3.31)
Capacity, cc (in ³)	3,453 (210.7)
Valve gear	Ohc
Camshaft drive	Chain
Compression ratio	9.3 to 1
Ignition	Electronic breakerless
Fuel injection	Bosch L-Jetronic
Max power	218 bhp (DIN) at 5,200 rpm
Max torque	224 lb ft at 4,000 rpm

TRANSMISSION	
Type	Getrag five speed
Clutch	Hydraulic diaphragm spring mph/1000rpm
Gear	Ratio
Top	1.0
4th	1.263
3rd	1.776
2nd	2.403
1st	3.717
Final drive gear	Hypoid bevel 3.07 to 1
Radio	MacPherson strut
SUSPENSION	
Front—location	Coil springs dampers Yes (24 mm)
Rear—location	Independent semi-trailing arm
	Coil springs dampers anti-roll bar Yes (18 mm)

STEERING	
Type	ZF recirculating ball
Power assistance	Yes
Wheel diameter	14 in.
Turns lock to lock	3.5
BRAKES	
Circuits	Twin split front and rear
Front	11.0 in. dia. ventilated disc
Rear	10.7 in. dia. ventilated disc
Servo	Vacuum
Handbrake	Centre lever, rear drum within disc
WHEELS	
Type	Alloy
Rim width	6 1/2 in.
Tyres—make	Michelin XWX
type	Radial ply
size	195/70 VR 14
pressures	F 30, R 30 psi (normal driving)

EQUIPMENT	
Battery	12V 66Ah
Alternator	65A
Headlamps	110/220W
Reversing lamp	Standard
Hazard warning	Standard
Electric fuses	17
Screen wipers	2-speed + intermittent + flick wipe
Screen washer	Electric
Interior heater	Water valve
Air conditioning	Extra
Interior trim	Cloth seats, pvc headlining
Floor covering	Carpet
Jack	Screw pillar
Jacking points	2 each side under sills
Windscreens	Laminated
Underbody protection	Paint system, bitumatic, pvc

HOW THE BMW M535i COMPARES

BMW M535i

£13,745

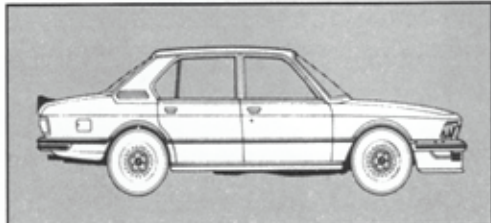
Front engine,
rear drive

Capacity
3,453 c.c.

Power
218 bhp (DIN)
at 5,200 rpm

Weight
2,971 lb/1,350 kg

Autotest
30 August 1980



Audi 200 5T

£12,950

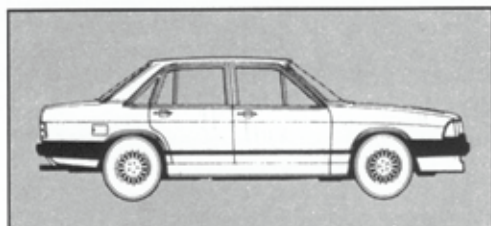
Front engine,
front drive

Capacity
2,144 c.c.

Power
170 bhp (DIN)
at 5,300 rpm

Weight
2,910 lb/1,320 kg

Autotest of Audi 200
5T Automatic
5 July 1980



Ford Granada 2.8i GLS

£9,300

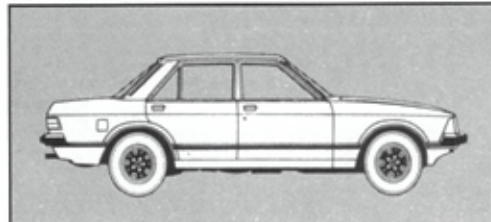
Front engine,
rear drive

Capacity
2,792 c.c.

Power
160 bhp (DIN)
at 5,200 rpm

Weight
2,971 lb/1,350 kg

Autotest of 2.8iS
18 February 1978



Mercedes-Benz 280SE

£14,458

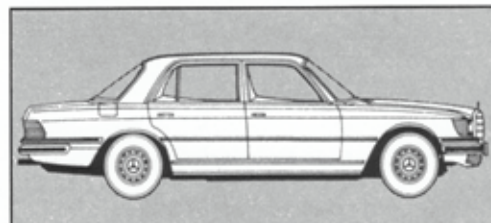
Front engine,
rear drive

Capacity
2,748 c.c.

Power
165 bhp (DIN)
at 6,000 rpm

Weight
3,676 lb/1,669 kg

Autotest
12 July 1973



Opel Senator 2.8S

£9,223

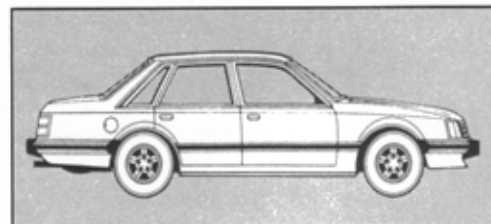
Front engine,
rear drive

Capacity
2,784 c.c.

Power
180 bhp (DIN)
at 5,800 rpm

Weight
3,090 lb/1,400 kg

Autotest of Senator
automatic
11 November 1978



Saab 900 Turbo

£10,750

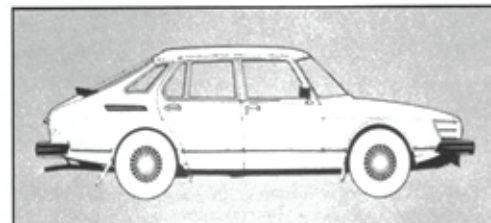
Front engine,
front drive

Capacity
1,985 c.c.

Power
145 bhp (DIN)
at 5,000 rpm

Weight
2,888 lb/1,310 kg

Autotest
28 July 1979



MPH & MPG

Maximum speed (mph)

BMW M535i	139
Audi 200 5T*	123
Mercedes Benz 280 SE*	120
Opel Senator*	119
Saab 900 Turbo	118
Ford Granada 2.8i S	117

Acceleration 0-60 (sec)

BMW M535i	7.1
Audi 200 5T*	8.7
Ford Granada 2.8iS	8.9
Opel Senator*	9.2
Saab 900 Turbo	9.6
Mercedes Benz 280 SE*	9.7

Overall mpg

Saab 900 Turbo	22.2
Ford Granada 2.8iS	20.8
BMW M535i	20.2
Opel Senator*	18.6
Audi 200 5T*	17.7
Mercedes Benz 280 SE*	16.7

*Test data for automatic versions

Other possible choices might be the Rover 3500S (£11,852) and Jaguar XJ6 4.2 (£15,798). Neither would come near to beating the 535i. The old maxim is confirmed: put big engine in tolerably light medium sized car for vivid performance and relative economy. Even if manual gearbox test data were available for the Opel and Audi Turbo (there is no manual gearbox option on the Mercedes), the BMW would still destroy the competition. It is considerably more accelerative in the mid range than the 635i coupé (and only 1 mph slower ultimately). One would have to look to the barely faster and much thirstier Porsche 928 or Jaguar XJ-S Auto for a true mid-range performance comparison. Best of all the BMW's performance comes with very impressive levels of mechanical refinement only equalled by the Saab (another undeniably efficient car), Opel or Mercedes.

ON THE ROAD

All steer well and are straight-line stable. Assuming Opel and Saab buyers go for the optional Pirelli P6 package to match the P6 and TRX shod Audi and Granada it would be hard to split these four on ultimate dry road grip. Understeer is of course more pronounced on the front-wheel-drive pair and traction sometimes hard to find (particularly in the Audi) on wet roads. The limited slip equipped M535i rates highly on traction. Understeer is rarely present. Its eager turn-in and neutral-power-on cornering balance are typically BMW, i.e. in extremis lift off oversteer is present. Power oversteer is easily provokable in the lower gears on wet roads. The Granada, Opel, and Mercedes also have semi-trailing arm rear suspension but have much less power and are more docile to handle

at the limit having some initial understeer and mild lift-off 'tuck-in'. On ride the Opel and Mercedes score high with the tauter BMW, S-pack Granada, Audi, and Saab marginally less compliant but still comfortable. The BMW's brakes are powerful but oversensitive. A criticism that applies to a lesser extent in the Granada and Mercedes. All are well enough ventilated, and have adequate heat supply. In heater control, the BMW's water valve system comes firmly last.

SIZE & SPACE

Legroom front/rear (in)

(seats fully back)

Mercedes Benz 280 SE	42 / 40
Ford Granada 2.8i S	41 / 40
Audi 200 5T	42 / 37
BMW M535i	43.5 / 35.5
Opel Senator	39 / 39
Saab Turbo	38 / 39

All six cars provide comfortable and supportive seating, also roomy accommodation for four. We liked the BMW particularly for its quite superb semi-rally type seats (peculiar to the M535i) and their huge range of adjustment, though when moved back fully this and their bulk inevitably restricts rear seat legroom somewhat. The Saab provides accommodation enough to belie its overall compactness — and the above figures — moreover it has the advantage of having hatchback load-carrying versatility. Otherwise there is little to choose in luggage carrying capacity with the proviso that vertically mounted spare wheels in the Opel and Granada slightly restrict usable boot width.

VERDICT

If performance be your main criteria then the M535i stands alone and unequalled. It evokes something of the old 3.0-litre CSi lightweight Coupe's character — its vivid acceleration and mechanical smoothness. The S-class Mercedes (available with automatic only) has a solid quality. It more than matches the BMW in high speed cruising refinement, stability, handling, but needs an engine of some 4-litres to come near the Bavarian's performance. For the less well heeled buyer (comparatively) who simply requires a car that is quick enough and in other respects an excellent all rounder, the Opel (or Vauxhall Royale) and Granada offer much. Equally practical though perhaps less appealing to the real enthusiast are the front wheel drive Saab and Audi Turbos. Frankly all are desirable. Yet for those who can afford the extra (yet nearly £3,000 less than the 635CSi) there is this remarkable full family sized BMW. It possesses real grand touring car performance, better than usual economy, refinement, and manners that, if not perfect, come quite close.