



The view most other drivers will see . . . the BMW Motorsport-inspired M535i is fabulously fast.

## Wunderbar!

By shoehorning their biggest engine in a 5-series shell, BMW have produced a real flyer that manages to remain economical at the same time. JOHN BOLSTER reports from the hot seat.

*The ultimate Q car? From most angles the M535i looks as harmless as a lowly 518.*



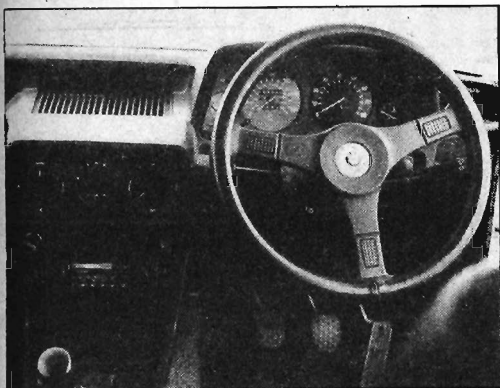
BMW Motorsport GmbH have produced a really quick car, of which 200 examples per year will be sold on the British market in right-hand drive form. The basis of the machine is the largest production BMW engine, squeezed into the smallest saloon body that will take it.

The power unit is the 3453cc six-cylinder with fuel injection, which develops 218bhp, and it is in unit with a Getrag 'sports' 5-speed gearbox. This component differs from that normally fitted to the cars from Munich, which has an overdrive fifth gear for economical cruising. The sports'box has a direct drive on fifth, with relatively closely spaced ratios for maximum performance, and the gate deviates in having a dog-leg change into first, which is left and back. The chassis-mounted hypoid final drive has a ratio of 3.07:1 and carries a limited-slip differential.

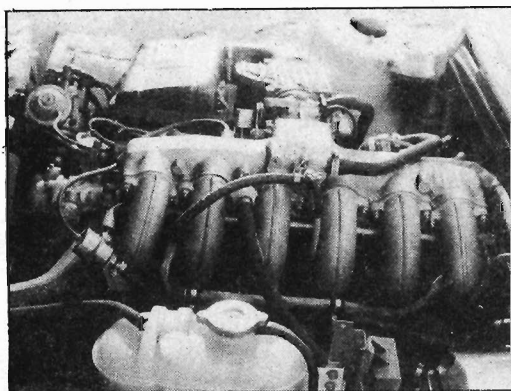
The Motorsport Division take a standard 5-series bodysell, which they adapt for the exceptionally high speeds of which it will be capable. Aerodynamically, the car is rendered stable by a deep plastic air dam in front and a rubber spoiler on the back of the boot lid. Special springs, giving less static deflection, are controlled by uprated Bilstein dampers and there are stiffer anti-roll torsion bars, front and rear. All the brake discs are ventilated, the back ones having small, integral drums for the hand brake. Light-alloy wheels are standard, fitted with 195/70 VR14 Michelin XWX tyres, and the ZF recirculating-ball steering gear is power-assisted.

Obviously, the performance potential is very great when the big engine, which normally propels the 735i saloon and the 635CSi coupé, is installed in the much lighter and more compact 5-series car. However, let me first of all stress that this is an ultra-flexible and docile vehicle. The slowest imaginable traffic crawling (such as trying to find a parking place in Tunbridge Wells) does not worry it in the least, and there is never the slightest suspicion of fouled sparking plugs. No doubt the Bosch electronic ignition and L-Jetronic fuel injection are largely responsible for this happy state of affairs.

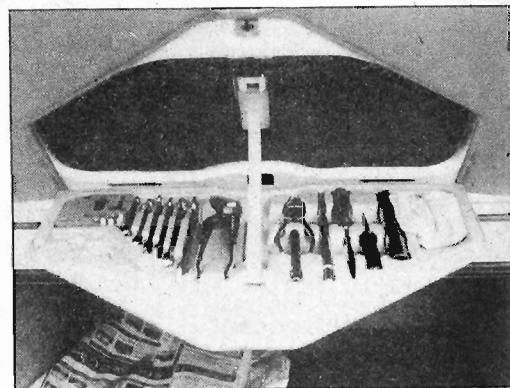
Nevertheless, it is the vivid acceleration and the easy speed capabilities of the car that are most impressive.



The steering column is adjustable for length.



The biggest road-going BMW engine, the 3½-litre six.



Neat detail — tray of tools is carried in the boot lid.

The gearbox has been greatly improved since I drove this model in Germany and the changes are now rapid and easy, once the driver has become accustomed to the lever positions. One expects a big BMW to accelerate fiercely up to 80mph, but then fourth gear goes in and 115mph seems to be there in an instant, when fifth is engaged. Still the acceleration continues, past 130mph, and the maximum proves to be almost exactly 140mph, which is what the makers claim. This is about 250rpm short of the ignition cutout speed at around 6200rpm, so the car is not under-gearred.

BMW's are getting quieter and although this sporting model, very properly, has that glorious note that only a six-cylinder engine can produce, it is far from noisy. Indeed, even at cruising speeds around 120mph (on the *Autobahn* of course) the sound level is remarkably low and the wind and tyre noises are moderate. At all times, the car is utterly effortless, which adds enormously to the pleasure of driving, especially on long journeys.

The ride is fairly hard at low speeds, with some bump thump on neglected urban roads, but it is remarkably comfortable when the car is travelling fast, while the absence of roll on corners is appreciated by the passengers. Some people are enthusiastic about the Recaro seats, which give good lateral location, but I find them too hard, the same criticism applying to the

rear seating arrangements, though again this is a matter of opinion.

The steering column is adjustable for length and all the controls are well placed, especially the pedals, which make heel-and-toe so easy that one does it all the time, just for fun! This is a vintage virtue that is far too rarely met in modern cars. The machine is well-balanced and the steering response is largely neutral under all normal conditions, though oversteer can be induced by the usual methods. Excellent traction is a feature and it needs to be, with such potent acceleration. Of course, some discretion must be exercised on wet roads, even with a limited-slip differential.

### Economical

Compared with other very fast cars, the M535i is remarkably economical on fuel. In some cases this is because only automatic transmission is offered, and the Getrag synchromesh gearbox certainly contributes to the result, but the BMW six-cylinder engine must be outstandingly efficient, for an average of over 20mpg is easy to obtain, except in city traffic. Although the M535i costs £13,745, without some of the luxury extras that were on the test car, even the wealthiest owner may

appreciate a moderate fuel consumption.

The power-assisted steering gives some feel of the road and a modicum of castor return after a corner. The sporting driver might ask for slightly higher gearing, but cars of this class are also bought by the portly businessman, who would find such steering too twitchy; this is therefore a sensible compromise. The brakes cope very well with their formidable task, for although the 5-series car is considerably lighter than the 7-series, there is still a lot of it to stop.

Very legible are the large rev-counter and speedometer, the latter having bold figures for the mileage recorder that can be easily read by the passenger-navigator. The heating and ventilation are well arranged and effective. A delightful feature is the excellent tool kit in a fitted drawer, built into the boot lid.

While the M535i is reasonably compact, it is a practical 4-door, 4/5-seater with ample luggage space. Nevertheless, the M in its title stands for Motorsport and this is, above all, a car of very high performance, with impeccable handling and roadholding. In spite of its fierce acceleration, its fuel economy is remarkable, which is a proof of the efficiency of the BMW six-cylinder engine — and the sound is music to the ears of the motoring enthusiast

## BMW M535i £13,745

### Specifications

Cylinders, capacity.....	6, 3453cc
Bore x stroke.....	93.4 x 84.0mm
Valve gear.....	Chain-driven overhead camshaft
Compression ratio.....	9.3:1
Fuel system.....	Bosch L-Jetronic injection
Power/rpm.....	218bhp DIN at 5200rpm
Torque/rpm.....	224 lb/ft at 4000rpm
Gear ratios.....	1.0, 1.263, 1.776, 2.403 and 3.717:1
Final drive.....	Hypoid, limited-slip, 3.07:1
Steering.....	ZF power-assisted recirculating ball
Brakes.....	Servo-assisted ventilated discs
Wheels.....	Light-alloy, 6½ins rims
Tyres.....	195/70 VR14 XWX
Suspension (F).....	Independent, MacPherson, anti-roll bar
(R).....	Independent, semi-trailing arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar

### Dimensions

Wheelbase.....	103.8ins
Track (F/R).....	56ins/57.3ins
Length.....	181.8ins
Width.....	66.5ins
Weight.....	3304lbs
Boot.....	21.7 cu ft

### Performance

Max in 5th.....	140mph
Max in 4th.....	115mph
Max in 3rd.....	82mph
Max in 2nd.....	61mph
Max in 1st.....	39mph
Max in 0—30mph.....	2.5s
0—50mph.....	5.2s
0—60mph.....	7.0s
0—80mph.....	11.8s
0—100mph.....	19.2s
0—120mph.....	32.0s
Standing ¼ mile.....	15.7s
40—60mph in 5th.....	8.2s

### Fuel

Testing.....	18 to 24 mpg
Urban, 56, 75mph.....	14.7, 33.1, 26.8 mpg

Only the deep air dam gives the game away from the front.

