



BMW 3-Series (2005 - 2012)

Technocrat

Review | With feelings between hope and fear drivers of leased cars anticipated in masses the arrival of the new BMW 3-series. The hope was that the new 3 would distinguish itself from the competition, like every other BMW, through its superior driving qualities. The fear was that its design would be as radical as the other new BMW's, which could rub the business world the wrong way. The pictures give a decisive answer about the design. To review the driving qualities a comprehensive test-drive was required.

The intention was to photograph the 3-series in front of different office buildings to get an impression of how that would look. This immediately caused problems: does the 3 belong in the executive parking spaces straight in front of the entrance, or in a parking space that the rest of the personnel use? The answer was easy for the 5-series: executive. The 1-series is obvious too: personnel. The 3-series however is more difficult to place.



Technology

Driving from one office building to the next it is remarkable how the 3-series distinguishes itself from other business cars in this range: the technology is progressive, the mechanics are perfect. The rest of the drive would therefore continue to be a search for spectacular machinery!

To begin with the technology: almost everything that makes the 5-series progressive can be found in the 3-series test-vehicle "Executive Dynamic"-version. The most important of them all is iDrive; BMW's system that combines navigation, telephony, audio and on-board computer into a system with one screen and one button. This system is still by far the best system on the market. It not only works well, it is adjustable to one's own taste too and extremely easy to operate. iDrive is not available for the 1-series, nor even for the X3, but, for whatever misguided reason, it is for the new 3-series!

But the urge for regeneration does not end with iDrive. At the time almost every detail has been re-developed and now the new 3-series is profiting from that. Even things like operating the indicators and windscreen wipers are more practical than they are in almost any other car, but strangely enough they have not yet been copied. The sleek design of the interior of the 5-series has been adopted almost unchanged, albeit the 3-series is not incredibly spacious.



Space

The front seats, where the seat is adjustable in length, are special. Not only the height but also the seating angle is adjustable, where with many other cars sitting lower automatically means leaning further back. The width of the backrest is even electrically adjustable. A lumbar support however has been completely forgotten, just where the extra support in the lower back would be most welcome, especially during longer journeys.

The room on the back seat should rapidly be forgotten too. Despite well thought through space saving measures in the back of the front seats, the legroom is considerably less than average for a car in this range. This is, among other things, a result of the space needed for the rear wheel drive, which brings us to the next distinctive point: mechanics.

Mechanics

Smart electronics and thought through ergonomics

make for a lot of comfort, but the real work comes down to mechanics. Particularly here BMW has held within living memory to its own course. So it is that every BMW has rear wheel drive. The front wheels are only there for steering and are not "bothered" to perform any other duty. BMW takes it even a step further than other rear wheel drives by distributing the weight as evenly as possible over the front and rear wheels.

The outcome is a car that reacts noticeably more pleasantly, particularly in the bends. The driver feels able to do more with the car and to have better control. In a nutshell: lots of driving enjoyment and the urge to go round every roundabout at least twice!



Still, it is this point in particular that the 3-series falls behind within its own family. In the past BMW has demonstrated that things can yet be better. A 5-series, if provided with "active front steering" (for description see test report 530d), manoeuvres just as well in city traffic, but is even more stable at high speeds thanks to its size. The 1-series is much livelier thanks to its light weight and therefore a much more manoeuvrable car than the new 3-series. The wide tyres on this 320d make this test vehicle very sensitive to ruts and every rough patch and unevenness is felt in the steering wheel.

Diesel

The pricelist includes four petrol engines (from 1.8 to 3.0 litre) and one 2-litre diesel engine. The choice of the latter was made because of the aim at the

business market. For a car this size an engine of "only" 2 litres may be somewhat small. Thanks to the use of a lot of aluminium and synthetics the 3-series is relatively lightweight, which gives the engine more than enough power.

The key is replaced with a cube that nevertheless does not offer "keyless entry". This electronic "key" has buttons to lock and unlock the doors. The electronic key is placed in a slot in the dashboard and then all it takes is a short push on the start button. The electronics deal with pre-heating, if necessary, and then start the engine. Only a very good listener will hear this is a diesel engine, for the 3-series is as quiet as can be expected of a car in this price range.

Communication

Thereafter all expectations of a new BMW become reality. Communication between car and driver is very good, which already begins with the pedals. Through the clutch it is obvious how much power the engine provides by noting how few revolutions are required. Unfortunately there is no water temperature gauge, or a rev counter with a lit dial like the one in the more expensive BMW, which indicates how many revolutions are acceptable with the current engine temperature.

Very practical however is the analogue fuel consumption meter that gives an exact reading of the current fuel consumption and helps to drive more economically. Despite this the fuel consumption was higher than stated by the manufacturer even with a way of driving that for many other test vehicles has led to a more economical consumption than the manufacturer's promise.

On the other hand though stands a great performance. 0 to 62 mph takes 8.3 seconds, which for a diesel is remarkably fast. On the motorway too there is always enough reserve left, which gives a feeling of superiority. In sixth gear the 2-litre diesel hardly makes a sound and large distances are covered with great ease. Drivers leasing this car can relax.



Conclusion

Many drivers that lease a car feared the new and extravagant design of BMW, and many have still not come to terms with it. The 3-series has been adjusted on all points so that the sharp edges have been taken away literally and figuratively speaking. This makes the newcomer more acceptable even to a more conservative public. Once parked next to an old 3-series, the progress still is huge and the predecessor instantly looks hopelessly out-of-date.

Handling too has greatly improved and BMW has not deviated from its formula for success. Still, there is something better, it is nothing less than a competitor from within BMW: the 1-series is livelier and offers more pleasure for less money. The 3-series though does do better in comfort (level of noise, space and equipment) and even gets close to the 5-series. Whatever the choice may be: the driver of a leased car with an eye for pure driving can trust BMW to provide a car on any level. ■



Specifications

BMW 3-Series (2005 - 2012) 320d SE

Size and weight



Length x width x height	452 x 182 x 142 cm
Wheelbase	276 cm
Kerb weight	1.490 kg
Trailer	745 kg
Trailer - braked	1.600 kg
Fuel capacity	60 l
Luggage space	460 l
Tyre size	

Engine and performance



Capacity	1995 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	163 PS @ 4000 rpm
Max torque	340 Nm @ 2000 rpm
Drive	rear wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	8.3 secs
Top speed	225 km/h
Average mileage	5.7 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	7.8 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	4.5 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	153 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 25,270
Price base model	Â£ 20,720