

40 years of the BMW 3 Series model range. Setting the benchmark for driving pleasure in the mid-size class for six generations.

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1. 40 years of the BMW 3 Series model range. Setting the benchmark for driving pleasure in the mid-size class for six generations. (Introduction)



The BMW 3 Series can look back over an extraordinary career path. Among the key milestones along the way have been its success in pioneering a new category of vehicle, establishing itself as the embodiment of driving pleasure in its segment and becoming the world's top-selling premium car. The model range was launched 40 years ago to replace the already legendary BMW 02, and is now set to enter its sixth generation. Today, as in 1975, purchasing a BMW 3 Series represents an expression of joy in sporty, agile handling, enthusiasm for innovative technology and appreciation of premium quality.

First unveiled at the 1975 International Motor Show (IAA) in Frankfurt, the BMW 3 Series has since developed into both the brand's most successful model range and an international bestseller. And that makes the 3 Series a highly effective global ambassador for BMW's core attributes. Its history is testament to the advances achieved by the German carmaker in the areas of sporting ability, efficiency, safety, comfort and connectivity, as well as to the development of BMW design. Again and again, the introduction of trailblazing technological innovations in the BMW 3 Series has also broken new ground in the mid-size class in general. Moreover, for four decades now the BMW 3 Series has led the way with new vehicle concepts that have expanded the brand's model line-up and injected fresh ideas into the segment as a whole.

The underlying character of the BMW 3 Series endures from generation to generation, complemented by the addition of new technological advances. Its design has likewise been shaped by a characteristic BMW sense of continuity and evolution. Indeed, throughout the model range's history, its striking front end with twin circular headlights and familiar BMW kidney grille, the dynamic lines of the car's flanks and the powerful rear end have always been quick to catch the eye. As for the interior, the unmistakable driver-focused cockpit design already established itself as a key element in the first model generation. The 3 Series' exceptional run of victories in race competition has also contributed to the car's status as a byword for sports performance. From the success notched up by the original BMW M3, its enviable record has continued all the way to victory in the German Touring Car Masters (DTM) race series in 2014.

Sporty and efficient: the engines for the BMW 3 Series.

The first generation of the mid-size sedan delighted customers with a level of sporty handling never before offered in this segment, while also impressing with its super-economical engines. Thanks to the performance and sporty, commanding character of those engines, the transfer of power to the rear wheels and the efficiency with which the resultant driving pleasure is conjured up, the BMW 3 Series continues to rise above its rivals to this day.

In 1977, two years after the launch of the new model range, the BMW 3 Series became the first car in its class to be available with six-cylinder engines. Further innovations were to follow, including revolutionary injection and engine management systems, ultra-sporty diesel engines and weight minimisation through the use of aluminium and magnesium.

Today, the new generation of BMW Group engines in the BMW 3 Series lies at the heart of BMW EfficientDynamics. The continued improvement in engine performance and driving attributes, coupled with reductions in fuel consumption and emissions, has been a decisive factor in securing the pioneering status of the BMW 3 Series.

Outstandingly agile, exceptionally safe: the chassis technology of the BMW 3 Series.

Brawny engines and power transfer to the rear wheels have been combined with finely balanced weight distribution and advanced chassis construction from day one of the BMW 3 Series. Back in 1975, drivers of a BMW 3 Series were already guaranteed handling that was sportier than any of its rivals and assured in any situation, thanks to technically sophisticated suspension, extremely precise steering uncorrupted by torque steer and powerful brakes. It is a standard that has been maintained through to the new generation of the car. Each and every component of the chassis may have undergone an impressive process of development over the course of four decades and six generations, but the basic concept underpinning Sheer Driving Pleasure endures. Boasting the most advanced chassis in its segment, the BMW 3 Series continues to set the benchmark for sports performance and handling agility.

The BMW 3 Series' ascent to the top of the tree in terms of agility and safety has also been aided by another innovation. In 1985 the BMW 3 Series became the brand's first series-produced car to channel its power to the road through all four wheels. And today the BMW 3 Series Sedan is the only model range in which the BMW xDrive intelligent all-wheel-drive system can be combined with seven different engine variants.

Variety breeds success: the BMW 3 Series model variants.

The most successful model range in the BMW line-up has experienced an uninterrupted programme of expansion since it was first unveiled. A four-door body variant joined the two-door model in the range back in the second generation, and it wasn't long before the BMW M3 high-performance sports car, the first Touring model and the first Convertible based on the BMW 3 Series were given their premieres. The third generation of the model range saw the distinctively styled BMW 3 Series Coupe bring additional allure to the line-up, while the BMW 3 Series Compact forged a passage into a new vehicle segment.

Growth and changes within the model line-up have since been responsible for a succession of landmarks in the history of the BMW 3 Series, introducing innovative concepts which continue to set trends for the segment as a whole to this day. The diversity of models has played a significant role in enabling a variety of target groups to experience the sporting character of BMW 3 Series in different ways. The sixth model generation further extends this attractive selection of distinctive body variants, which are now split between two model ranges: the BMW 3 Series Sedan and BMW 3 Series Touring have been joined by the BMW 3 Series Gran Turismo, and the mid-size model portfolio now also includes the BMW 4 Series Coupe, BMW 4 Series Convertible and BMW 4 Series Gran Coupe.

2. A new line: The first generation of the BMW 3 Series.



The presentation of the BMW 3 Series in 1975 turned the page to a whole new chapter in automotive history. Although the two-door Sedan displayed distinctive characteristics emphasising its relationship with the BMW 5 Series unveiled three years earlier, the compact and sporting model that eventually made its debut on the market was a totally new car. From the very beginning, the 3 Series concept was tailored to drivers who placed exacting demands on their car, demanded powerful engines and flawless handling, and appreciated the far-reaching safety features previously only offered by luxury-class cars.

Expectations of the new model were high – after all, it was following in the tyre tracks of the internationally successful BMW 02. The BMW 3 Series was charged with the task of combining the sporty, agile character of its predecessor with new qualities in the areas of design, comfort, space and safety.

Clear forms, dynamic proportions and a premiere for the driver-focused cockpit design.

The design of the body followed the new approach already applied to the BMW 5 Series by head designer Paul Bracq and was distinguished by a clear use of forms. The front end was dominated by the striking BMW kidney grille and circular lights, the latter featured in twin-headlight form in the top-of-the-line models with 2.0-litre engine. Other distinctive elements included the coupe-like side window graphic including the Hofmeister kink at its trailing edge and the “power dome” contouring of the bonnet.

Its new proportions made the BMW 3 Series look significantly larger at first glance than its predecessor, although the 4,355-millimetre-long, 1,610-millimetre-wide and 1,380-millimetre-tall two-door was actually only a few centimetres larger in each respect than the BMW 02. Track widths of 1,364 millimetres at the front and 1,377 millimetres at the rear gave the new kid on the block a powerful stance.

The interior of the BMW 3 Series witnessed the debut of the now familiar driver-focused cockpit design. The vertically stacked controls in the centre of the dashboard were angled clearly towards the driver, making them easier to

reach and read. This new development helped to optimise ergonomics and remains a signature feature of BMW models to this day.

Powerful engines – also available with six cylinders for the first time in this class.

The official presentation of the BMW 3 Series – on the day before the opening of the 1975 International Motor Show (IAA) in Frankfurt – saw the Chairman of the BMW AG Board of Management draw particular attention to the BMW 320i. “In our eyes this car is the worthy modern successor to the fabled BMW 2002 tii,” noted Eberhard von Kuenheim. With a helping hand from fuel injection technology, the four-cylinder engine under the bonnet of the BMW 320i produced 92 kW/125 hp. And that was enough to propel it not only to the top of the 3 Series range but also into the highest reaches of car fans’ affections. In the year following its debut, readers of Europe’s biggest-selling motoring magazine voted the flagship 3 Series model “the world’s best sedan” in the class up to two litres displacement.

The model range also included the BMW 316, BMW 318 and BMW 320 variants from launch. Their model designations were derived from the size of their engine displacement: 1,573cc, 1,766cc and 1,990cc respectively. The sophisticated four-cylinder carburettor engines combined sporting performance characteristics with very reasonable fuel economy. Even the 66 kW/90 hp entry-level engine in the BMW 316, which weighed just 1,010 kilograms, allowed customers to experience smile-inducing agility and a top speed of 160 km/h (99 mph).

The engine line-up blossomed in spectacular style in 1977, as the lower mid-range welcomed the arrival of six-cylinder engines for the first time. The 2.0-litre engine for the BMW 320 and 2.3-litre unit bestowed on the BMW 323i were designed specially for the BMW 3 Series. The straight-six powering the BMW 323i included features such as electronically controlled engine management and transistor ignition, generated 105 kW/143 hp and accelerated the two-door car from 0 to 100 km/h (62 mph) in just 9.0 seconds.

The engine’s task of fast-tracking the 3 Series to sporting eminence in the mid-size segment was shared by independent suspension featuring control arms and spring struts at the front axle and semi-trailing arms/spring struts at the rear. The front axle control arms had a MacPherson construction using anti-roll bars, creating the perfect platform for excellent steering precision. The 3 Series also gave an all-new design feature its BMW premiere: elastically mounted rack-and-pinion steering. The first-generation car had

earned itself a reputation for outstanding driving dynamics and agility that remains resoundingly intact in the latest model to wear the 3 Series badge.

Successful changing of the guard: the BMW 3 Series becomes the new bestselling model in the company's history.

The BMW 315, powered by a 1.6-litre engine developing 55 kW/75 hp, joined the fray in 1981 as the new entry-level model in the line-up. The same year, BMW 3 Series sales reached the one-million mark. That meant the new model range had outstripped the figure recorded by its predecessor after just six years in production to become the most successful model in the company's history. Customer satisfaction levels were also exceptionally high. In a survey conducted in 1980, 80 per cent of BMW 3 Series drivers said there was "nothing they could improve" about their car.

A total of 1,364,039 units of the BMW 3 Series were sold up to 1983, of which 4,595 were in "Topcabriolet" trim. This take on the 3 Series recipe was the work of Stuttgart-based coachbuilder Baur, whom customers could commission to conjure any engine variant of the 3 Series into an open-top four-seater with a suitably burly rollover bar.

3. More variety: The second generation of the BMW 3 Series.



The second generation of the BMW 3 Series, presented in 1982, was a worthy successor to the trendsetting, bestselling original. Wherever you looked, the new model embodied progress and diversity. A new design, optimised aerodynamics, more space and comfort, extra power and additional body and engine variants were all part of the mix.

The new car's lines were significantly tauter and smoother than those of its predecessor, and its drag coefficient had been reduced by almost 15 per cent. All model variants, regardless of engine size, were now fitted with twin circular headlights as standard. Although the second-generation 3 Series offered four centimetres of extra legroom inside, its body was actually three centimetres shorter than the previous model. The front indicator lights were relocated from the wing tip into the bumper. The characteristic side view was given a fresh interpretation, while a broader B-pillar painted matt black provided a stronger-looking centre. The 35-millimetre-wider track, meanwhile, gave the new car a muscular appearance. To top it all, the BMW development engineers had shaved around 30 kilograms off the car's weight – despite its more generous equipment levels.

Advanced engine technology makes the BMW 3 Series a sportier and more efficient proposition.

The new BMW 3 Series lined up with further developed four- and six-cylinder engines. For example, the BMW 316 – which produced 66 kW/90 hp and now had an electronically controlled carburettor – boasted a top speed of 175 km/h (109 mph). Developing 77 kW/105 hp from its four-cylinder engine with mechanical injection, the BMW 318i powered to a maximum 184 km/h (114 mph). The six-cylinder models already featured an electronic injection system. The 102 kW/139 hp BMW 323i, for example, recorded a top speed of 202 km/h (126 mph), its five-speed gearbox with overdrive allowing it to post average fuel consumption of just 8.9 litres per 100 kilometres (31.7 mpg imp).

A new engine concept designed squarely with torque and economy improvements in mind was introduced in 1984, pushing efficiency to even greater heights. The six-cylinder in-line eta engine developed 90 kW/122 hp from its 2.7-litre displacement and enabled average fuel consumption of only

8.4 litres of regular petrol per 100 kilometres (33.6 mpg imp) in the BMW 325e. This was also the first BMW 3 Series model to be available exclusively with a catalytic converter. In the 1980s the BMW 3 Series featured the widest selection of variants fitted with a catalytic converter in its segment. Another new development was introduced into series production in the BMW 325e and, a year later, the BMW 325i with six-cylinder 126 kW/171 hp engine; digital engine electronics optimised fuel injection and mixture preparation.

Premiere for diesel engine, ABS and all-wheel drive.

Another engine variant presented at virtually the same time as the BMW 325i majored on economical driving. This was the first time BMW had fitted a diesel engine in its compact Sedan. The BMW 324d featured a six-cylinder in-line unit developing 63 kW/86 hp and hit a top speed of 165 km/h (103 mph). It recorded average fuel consumption of 6.9 litres per 100 kilometres (40.9 mpg imp).

In 1987 the original diesel variant was joined by the BMW 324td. Its new straight-six turbodiesel engine impressed with output raised to 85 kW/115 hp, lower fuel consumption and emissions, and lower levels of noise and vibrations. The key factor in this leap forward, along with the use of a turbocharger, were Digital Diesel Electronics (DDE). This technology brought more sophisticated injection – adjusted to the situation at hand – to diesel engines as well.

The second generation of the BMW 3 Series likewise put all its segment rivals in the shade when it came to agility, active safety and handling precision. The engineers had modified the front-axle construction for the new BMW 3 Series with the aim of further improving active safety, without detracting from the car's hallmark handling attributes. The modified rack-and-pinion steering provided enhanced turn-in and precision on bumpier sections of road as well. And a semi-trailing rear axle with separate springs and dampers was now pressed into action.

An electronic Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) was available for the six-cylinder models for the first time as an option, having been introduced not long before in the BMW 7 Series. This feature has been part of standard specification for all BMW 3 Series models since 1992.

The brand's first all-wheel-drive series-production model was also a member of the BMW 3 Series family. The BMW 325ix, presented in 1985, distributed the power from its 126 kW/171 hp six-cylinder engine between all four wheels. The BMW engineers have always declined the option of a switchable front-wheel drive approach. Instead, the transfer case with automatically actuated

visco locks allowed permanent four-wheel drive using ABS, which optimised traction and directional stability but also produced dynamic and harmonious driving characteristics.

A sports car based on the BMW 3 Series also roared into the spotlight at the 1985 Frankfurt Motor Show. The BMW M3 was powered by a 147 kW/200 hp four-cylinder engine with four-valve technology. Like the car's chassis technology, it was derived directly from the race track, and soon provided evidence of the impressive potential available as a result. The BMW M3 was the brand's first model also to be fitted – from model year 1987 – with electrically adjustable dampers.

Large selection: the BMW 3 Series in four-door, Convertible and Touring guise.

By the end of its first year in production, over 230,000 units of the second-generation BMW 3 Series had been sold – and the introduction of a second body variant was about to increase demand even further. The first BMW 3 Series with four doors was unveiled in autumn 1983 and offered principally functional benefits, notably more comfortable access to the rear compartment. The desire for open-air driving pleasure was likewise soon to be fulfilled. The BMW 3 Series Convertible presented in 1985 earned itself an instant fan club with its elegant silhouette, low and horizontal shoulderline and a seating position which made interaction with the outside world a particularly intense experience.

The development engineers' well of creativity was still far from dry. For example, the BMW 3 Series Touring revealed in 1987 represented a whole new way of combining driving pleasure and functionality. Sporty, agile and visually appealing, the first BMW 3 Series with a generously-sized rear compartment offered something different from the existing norm in this breed of car. And that set it apart as something of a trendsetter. The variety of BMW 3 Series models now available to customers played a major role in ensuring the second-generation car notched up 2,339,251 units in sales, outperforming its predecessor by almost a million cars in the process.

The history of this generation of the 3 Series also spans a raft of special editions and a pioneering role in the field of electric mobility. In 1987 eight BMW 325iX models were converted to electric front-wheel drive. The battery that would provide the requisite energy could be charged from a conventional power supply. This variant of the BMW 3 Series was the brand's first electric car to complete a practical trial under everyday conditions.

4. Pioneering style: The third generation of the BMW 3 Series.



The third-generation BMW 3 Series took to the stage in 1990 with extremely elegant contours and a thoroughly overhauled spread of technology. And it was available from launch as a four-door for the first time. The body had grown significantly in terms of exterior dimensions to create an even more comfortable and safer passenger compartment, and it offered occupants noticeably more space. Those in the rear, for example, could look forward to 30 millimetres of extra knee room. Despite its increase in size, the car's basic form also displayed an undeniably sporty edge. The long wheelbase, short overhangs, 1,418-millimetre front track and 1,431-millimetre rear track gave a strong hint of the new 3 Series' outstanding driving attributes.

Also instantly catching the eye alongside the new car's slender silhouette was its smooth front end, with each set of twin circular headlight units positioned behind a single glass cover. One of the benefits of this front-end construction, which remains the norm today, is optimised pedestrian protection. Safety was a big priority overall, and all variants of the new BMW 3 Series included new door strengthening elements for improved side impact protection.

Engines: three-figure output, innovative straight-six variants.

The engines available from launch all developed at least 100 hp. The entry-level 1.6-litre unit in the new BMW 316i, for example, produced 74 kW/100 hp while the BMW 318i had 83 kW/113 hp. The two innovative six-cylinder in-line engines in the line-up both now featured twin camshafts and four valves per cylinder. The BMW 320i developed 110 kW/150 hp and the BMW 325i was good for 141 kW/192 hp. Innovative technology designed to boost performance and reduce fuel consumption also came in the form of VANOS variable camshaft timing. It was first introduced in 1992 in the 210 kW/286 hp six-cylinder engine powering the second-generation BMW M3 and subsequently made the jump into the other six-cylinder models.

The inexorable rise of the sporty diesel engine continued with the arrival of the 2.5-litre, 85 kW/115 hp unit in the BMW 325td. And more was to come in 1993, a new turbocharged six-cylinder diesel engine with charge air cooling putting 105 kW/143 hp and peak torque of 260 Newton metres (192 lb-ft) at the disposal of the BMW 325tds. It powered the new Sedan from 0 to 100

km/h (62 mph) in 10.4 seconds, but had average fuel consumption of just 6.7 litres per 100 kilometres (42.2 mpg imp). A year later, the BMW 318tds was added to the range as the new entry-level diesel model. Its four-cylinder turbodiesel unit with charge air cooling and 66 kW/90 hp boasted impressive average fuel economy of 5.9 litres/100 km (47.9 mpg imp).

The new generation of six-cylinder in-line petrol engines which followed in 1995 were significantly lighter than those they replaced, thanks to their aluminium crankcase. They were also more powerful and more efficient. The displacement of the flagship engine increased from 2.5 to 2.8 litres, and the new range-topping model was given the BMW 328i badge. Stirring under the bonnet was output of 142 kW/193 hp and peak torque of 280 Newton metres (206 lb-ft).

Advanced chassis technology, including Automatic Stability Control (ASC) as an option.

The third generation of the BMW 3 Series employed a single-joint strut suspension with anti-roll bars at the front axle. At the rear, meanwhile, a new central control arm with two lateral control arms, one above the other, now ensured optimised directional stability (especially under high cornering speeds), harmonious roll characteristics and increased suspension comfort. Both the front and rear axle featured twin-tube gas-filled shock absorbers. And for the first time, the engineers had made the car's track wider at the rear than at the front. This arrangement remained a fixture of the 3 Series' design in the model generations that followed.

Power assistance for the latest development of BMW's rack-and-pinion steering system now came as standard in the BMW 318i, and the effectiveness of the brakes was also enhanced once again. The Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) was included as standard on all variants from 1992, and Automatic Stability Control (ASC) was now also offered as an option. The anti-slip control system, meanwhile, capped the generation of engine power to levels that could be transferred to the driven wheels before they threatened to start spinning – regardless of how heavily the driver was pressing the accelerator. From 1997 this technology was offered in extended form – as ASC+T – with additional brake intervention to stabilise the car.

Dynamic and distinctive: the first BMW 3 Series Coupe.

The third generation of the BMW 3 Series was also offered with a selection of body variants developed to appeal to additional customer groups. However, the launch order adopted by its predecessor was reversed. The four-door became the default variant for this segment, and the two-door – introduced at the start of 1992 – was no longer a sedan, but an extremely elegant coupe.

Although the similarity between the two- and four-door variants was clear, the two variants only shared a handful of parts. The first BMW 3 Series Coupe was a resolutely standalone car.

It was also the model on which the BMW M3 was based, it rode three centimetres closer to the road surface and cut an imposing figure with its suitably sporty front end. The classically elegant flank line was the product of an eight-centimetre-longer front end, lower bonnet, almost three-centimetre-shorter roof, wider doors with frameless windows, and a shorter and lower boot lid.

The BMW 3 Series Convertible was the next variant to hit the road in 1993. The open-top 3 Series once again featured a distinctively low shoulderline. It offered space for four people and unbeatable all-year weather protection courtesy of an outstandingly well-insulated soft-top roof. A hardtop could also be fitted as an option.

It wasn't long before BMW was unveiling another concept innovation. Launched in 1994, this new body variant offered a sporting character wrapped in particularly compact packaging. It was a combination reflected in its name: the BMW 3 Series Compact measured a mere 4.21 metres in length, had two doors and a steeply rising rear end (including a large boot lid) and offered space for four to five people.

In 1995 BMW presented the new edition of another mould-creating car. The new BMW 3 Series Touring now showcased the dynamic qualities of the 3 Series range and practical virtues of its body concept even more convincingly. The new five-door model came with largely the same equipment levels as the Sedan, combined with the exclusive upholstery options and interior colours available for the Coupe. Versatility with style was what the BMW 3 Series Touring was all about.

The third-generation BMW 3 Series in all its variants stayed in production for almost ten years. During this time, it sold a total of 2,745,780 units, once again exceeding the figure recorded by its predecessor with something to spare.

5. Sports performance laced with elegance: The fourth generation of the BMW 3 Series.



In spring 1998 the fourth generation of the BMW 3 Series set out on the road to the next century riding a wave of stylish continuity and unrelenting technical progress. Its proportions, lines and stylistic elements represented an expression of sporting elegance and left no doubt that the BMW 3 Series had established itself once and for all as the unmistakable original in its segment. The new BMW 3 Series, which was once again launched in four-door sedan form, had grown by four centimetres in both length and width compared to its predecessor. The BMW kidney grille was now integrated into the bonnet and teamed up with twin circular headlights behind clear covers to give the front end of the car a striking character. The dynamic ability of the new Sedan was accentuated by its stretched lines and more prominently arched roofline. Another signature BMW design feature were the L-shaped rear lights. The car's interior had also grown to reflect its exterior dimensions. Both the front and rear seats offered more room to move. Knee room in the rear compartment had been increased by 20 millimetres, while 10 millimetres had been added to the available headroom.

The fourth-generation BMW 3 Series benefited more than ever from expertise accumulated during the development of models in higher segments. The interplay of the body and chassis, the car's interior appointments and its safety concept all took their cues from the BMW 7 Series. The newly designed instrument panel looked modern, well sized and high in quality, and equipment features such as a multifunction steering wheel, side airbags in the rear, rain-sensing wipers and a navigation system set new benchmarks in the segment. "The essence of BMW is distilled in the 3 Series," summed up the testers from motoring magazine Autorevue after their first encounter with the new model.

Hallmark BMW driving pleasure, distinctive model variants.

The selection of available body variants expanded more quickly than in the previous model generation. The new BMW 3 Series Coupe, which was 17 millimetres longer, 18 millimetres wider and 46 millimetres lower to the road than its four-door sibling, took to the stage as early as April 1999. It also offered occupants significantly more space than its predecessor. The

combination of the car's distinctive proportions and a shallower windscreen angle produced a noticeably stretched, elegantly slender side view.

The third variant of the BMW 3 Series – the Touring – joined the line-up later that year, the BMW development engineers continuing to drive forward the idea of the dynamic, elegant and classy five-door car. The new Touring embodied the character of the 3 Series with undoubted clarity, but also displayed its own distinctive talents. It was 46 millimetres longer than its predecessor, 16 millimetres wider and 29 millimetres taller.

A Convertible variant was also developed for the fourth generation of the BMW 3 Series model range. The open-top four-seater made its debut in spring 2000. It was identical to the Coupe from front bumper to A-pillar, but the prominent beltline and muscular rear end gave it a character very much its own. On the inside, the Convertible was the first model in this class to feature front seats with integral seat belts as standard. Standard rollover protection, consisting of a rollover bar in the windscreen frame and two bars which extended automatically from the rear head restraints as required, maximised occupant protection even in extreme situations.

The new BMW M3 also celebrated its world premiere that year at the Geneva Motor Show. The contouring of its bonnet alone provided an indication of the power lurking beneath. The eye-catching bulge in the centre of the bonnet – the so-called “power dome” – created space for the new six-cylinder in-line engine with displacement of precisely 3,246cc and output of 252 kW/343 hp. In spring 2001 the line-up was expanded further to include the open-top variant of the high-performance sports car – the BMW M3 Convertible.

Early 2001 saw the arrival of a replacement for the BMW 3 Series Compact. A new interpretation of the signature BMW twin headlights gave the BMW 3 Series Compact a highly recognisable front end. It was also 53 millimetres longer and wider than its predecessor. All this extra space was used to enhance passenger comfort.

First BMW diesel engine with direct injection.

It was clear from the premiere of the fourth model generation that diesel engines would play a more significant role in the BMW 3 Series model range in the years ahead. A BMW diesel engine with direct injection was introduced for the first time, the 100 kW/136 hp four-cylinder unit powering the BMW 320d to a top speed of 207 km/h (129 mph), and impressing with low fuel consumption and remarkable smoothness.

The new petrol engines also had some groundbreaking innovations up their sleeves. The entry-level model was the four-cylinder BMW 318i with 87 kW/118 hp, and it was joined by a trio of six-cylinder variants – the BMW 320i with 110 kW/150 hp, the BMW 323i producing 125 kW/170 hp and the 142 kW/193 hp BMW 328i, which was capable of a 240 km/h (149 mph) top speed.

For model year 2000, BMW rejigged the displacement scale for the six-cylinder in-line engines. Three six-cylinder models would now be available for the BMW 3 Series. Joining the BMW 320i carried over from the previous generation were the BMW 325i and BMW 330i. The new flagship model, in particular, sparked unbridled enthusiasm among fans of sporty mid-size cars. The BMW engine developers had built an engine with hitherto unmatched high-revving characteristics, muscular power delivery, smoothness and efficiency. The straight-six unit generated 170 kW/231 hp from its 2,979cc displacement.

The new six-cylinder diesel engine with 3.0-litre displacement made its BMW 3 Series debut the same year. This powerful unit performed impressively under the bonnet of the BMW 330d thanks to output of 135 kW/184 hp and peak torque of 290 Newton metres (214 lb-ft). Featuring four-valve technology, direct injection, a turbocharger with variable turbine geometry and charge air cooling, its design principle largely mirrored that of the four-cylinder unit in the BMW 320d. There was, however, one key difference: a common-rail injection system took over fuel supply duties from the distributor-type fuel injection pump previously employed. BMW was therefore an early adopter of technology which remains the favoured option today in terms of both power delivery and smooth running.

The sporting yet extraordinarily refined character of BMW's diesel engines transformed the standing of this form of propulsion – and soon led to all-new applications. For example, in 2002 BMW unveiled its first diesel-engined Coupe, the BMW 330Cd. A short time later it was time for the first open-top diesel model to grace the BMW ranks. The BMW 320Cd Convertible led the way in 2004, but didn't have to wait long for the six-cylinder BMW 330Cd Convertible to join it in the line-up.

Back in 2001, BMW engine experts provided further evidence of their talent for innovation by developing technology aimed at enhancing driving dynamics while at the same time optimising fuel economy. Their new VALVETRONIC – fully variable intake valve timing – system for petrol engines was available exclusively for BMW vehicles, and the BMW 316ti Compact was the world's

first series-produced vehicle to be fitted with a 1.8-litre engine which worked using this technology. The four-cylinder unit produced 85 kW/115 hp.

BMW had developed VALVETRONIC as an alternative to the first generation of petrol direct injection systems, whose potential for fuel savings could not be exploited to sufficient effect in day-to-day driving. Also described as a throttle-free load control system, VALVETRONIC enabled a reduction in fuel consumption of up to ten per cent, regardless of fuel quality.

Weight-minimised chassis; DSC stability system introduced into the BMW 3 Series.

BMW developed a new lightweight chassis and innovative driving stability systems for the fourth generation of the BMW 3 Series model range. Its basic construction and a raft of technical highlights elevated the chassis to a level previously only explored by some luxury cars. Aluminium now accounted for around 20 per cent of the chassis' weight, while the targeted use of high-strength steel in the front and rear axle carriers shaved off a few more kilos.

The ASC+T traction control system was included in the standard specification of the BMW 3 Series once again. A new addition, meanwhile, was Dynamic Stability Control (DSC), which intervened as required to counteract understeer or oversteer through dynamically taken corners. Initially available as an option for the BMW 328i, in 2001 it became a standard feature of all BMW 3 Series models.

From 2000 both the Sedan and Touring versions of the BMW 3 Series were offered with the new version of BMW's all-wheel-drive system. This permanent transfer of power to all four wheels was now linked up with the Dynamic Stability Control system.

By the end of 1999 the success of the fourth-generation BMW 3 Series could also be found on record in the statistical data compiled by the Federal Motor Vehicle Office in Flensburg, Germany. The BMW 3 Series ended the year in third place in Germany's registration statistics – a level of success never before achieved by a representative of this market segment. By the time production of the fourth model generation had come to an end, total sales had climbed to a historical peak for the BMW 3 Series of 3,266,885 units.

6. Exceptional efficiency: The fifth generation of the BMW 3 Series.



The fifth generation of the BMW 3 Series celebrated its world premiere at the 2005 Geneva International Motor Show. In what was now the regular running order for model range launches, the four-door Sedan was the first model variant to be introduced. Its striking appearance, with short body overhangs, dynamic lines and a progressive design language, imbued it with an unmistakable character from day one. The new symbiosis of powerful and efficient engines, dynamic yet refined driving characteristics, eye-catching design (with the familiar BMW use of forms), a spacious body with impressive torsional rigidity and innovative equipment features met with enthusiastic approval around the world. In its first year post-launch, the new BMW 3 Series was awarded the title “World Car of the Year” in New York.

The far more imposing and powerful aura of the new BMW 3 Series Sedan compared to its predecessor was the result of a more striking design and larger dimensions. Indeed, the new car added 49 millimetres in length, 78 millimetres in width and 10 millimetres in height. This all-round growth was used to the benefit of occupant comfort and safety. However, intelligent lightweight design meant that, despite the car’s extra size and equipment, it was no heavier on the scales.

More driving pleasure, less weight and lower fuel consumption across all variants.

All the variants of the fifth-generation BMW 3 Series offered an unsurpassed combination of space, comfort, safety, dynamics and efficiency – regardless of their body type. The new BMW 3 Series Touring stood apart from its predecessor and surged to the top of its segment on the back of significant increases in many areas (aside from weight), as well as featuring an upper-case initial in its model designation for the first time. The five-door variant, also presented during the course of 2005, was 42 millimetres longer, 78 millimetres wider and 9 millimetres taller than its predecessor. Occupant comfort and load capacity were among the winners here, and the car’s driving characteristics were also enhanced, as the 35-millimetre longer wheelbase helped to reduce vehicle vibrations.

The BMW 3 Series Coupe introduced in 2006 was also more distinctive than ever. Its standalone character was marked out instantly by the stretched, sporty lines of a body which had been newly designed down to individual details. The new BMW 3 Series Coupe also offered more interior space than its predecessor.

The new BMW 3 Series Convertible introduced in March 2007 was the first open-top BMW to feature a retractable hardtop. The new roof construction enabled an incomparable degree of soundproofing – even at high speeds. The body, which boasted exceptional torsional rigidity, also created the ideal platform for impressive agility and dynamic excellence. When closed, the roof also allowed occupants excellent all-round visibility and a bright, exclusive ambience thanks to large glazed surfaces and a full roof lining. Opening the roof allowed those on board to experience the atmosphere of supreme openness defined by the flat waistline typical of a BMW 3 Series Convertible.

The new BMW M3 was also presented in 2007. The high-performance sports car, based on the BMW 3 Series Coupe, boasted a distinctive design exuding high-level athleticism and was powered by a newly developed V8 engine with 309 kW/420 hp. It was a combination that secured the latest M3 a stand-out position in the exclusive ranks of top-class premium sports cars. The introduction of a selection of other body variants in spring 2008 provided even greater scope for individuality. A trio of distinctive characters were now ready for action – the BMW M3 Coupe, BMW M3 Convertible and BMW M3 sedan.

BMW EfficientDynamics technology arrives in the BMW 3 Series.

The range of engines developed for the fifth generation of the BMW 3 Series included a wealth of innovations focused on enhancing driving pleasure and efficiency in equal measure. The four-cylinder diesel engine powering the BMW 320d used second-generation common-rail injection and a turbocharger with variable turbine geometry to deliver output of 120 kW/163 hp and peak torque of 340 Newton metres (251 lb-ft). The two six-cylinder petrol engines, like the 110 kW/150 hp four-cylinder petrol unit, were equipped with VALVETRONIC throttle-free load control. Developing 190 kW/258 hp from 3.0-litre displacement in the BMW 330i and 160 kW/218 hp from 2.5-litre displacement in the BMW 325i, they offered the majestic dynamics for which BMW's six-cylinder engines are renowned, plus a choice of two output options. They also showcased another exclusive new feature: these were the first volume-produced engines to be equipped with a magnesium-aluminium composite crankcase.

The launch of the new BMW 3 Series Coupe was accompanied by the next engine innovation to set tongues wagging. The world's first six-cylinder in-line engine with BMW TwinTurbo technology, High Precision Injection and an all-aluminium crankcase generated maximum output of 225 kW/306 hp from its 3.0-litre displacement and powered the BMW 335i Coupe into a new dimension of dynamic excellence, combined with a level of efficiency unsurpassed in this output class.

The following year, the likewise 3.0-litre engine in the BMW 335d took over as the flagship variant of this diesel engine family. Its likewise unique combination of variable TwinTurbo technology and third-generation common-rail direct injection produced maximum output of 210 kW/286 hp and peak torque of 580 Newton metres (428 lb-ft).

A new generation of engines and the extensive application of BMW EfficientDynamics technology also gave four-cylinder representatives of the fifth-generation BMW 3 Series a balance between performance and fuel consumption unmatched by its rivals. The new four-cylinder models came with features such as Brake Energy Regeneration, the Auto Start Stop function, an Optimum Gearshift Indicator and on-demand operation of ancillary units. The introduction of BMW EfficientDynamics technology into BMW's most important model series (when measured by new registrations) made an extremely effective contribution to reducing fuel consumptions and emissions.

Outstanding agility thanks to state-of-the-art chassis technology.

In the development of the fifth-generation BMW 3 Series, the engineers also pulled off the trick of taking chassis technology another significant step forwards as part of a close alliance with the engine and body. For drivers, this resulted in a noticeable gain in agility and driving pleasure.

The construction of the front axle was again inspired by technology developed for luxury-class cars. The construction concept behind the double-joint tiebar spring-strut axle replicated the principle used in the BMW 5 Series. The torque struts, control arms, swivel bearings and front axle carrier were made entirely from aluminium. The five-link rear axle of the BMW 3 Series was also all-new. Its unique construction provided the perfect platform for extremely dynamic handling.

The Dynamic Stability Control system for the fifth-generation BMW 3 Series had significantly greater functionality. For the first time, the special Dynamic Traction Control (DTC) mode could be selected at the touch of a button. Added to which, Cornering Brake Control (CBC), a Start-Off Assistant, Brake

Standby, Fading Compensation and a Dry Braking function were also included in the system.

The fifth-generation BMW 3 Series achieved impressive popularity around the world. Sales of the Sedan, Touring, Coupe and Convertible reached a combined total of 3,102,345 units.

7. Innovative character: The sixth generation of the BMW 3 Series.



The current, sixth generation of the BMW 3 Series appeared on the market in early 2012. Since then, the alluring array of individual body variants has been extended yet further and, for the first time, split into two model ranges. The BMW 3 Series Sedan and the BMW 3 Series Touring were joined by the BMW 3 Series Gran Turismo, while the mid-size model portfolio now also numbers the BMW 4 Series Coupe, BMW 4 Series Convertible and BMW 4 Series Gran Coupe.

The market launch of the new BMW 3 Series Sedan signalled yet another raft of innovations for the mid-size segment in terms of drivetrain, chassis and safety as well as driver assistance systems. The sixth-generation BMW 3 Series Sedan was, for example, the first vehicle in this segment to offer an 8-speed Steptronic transmission. Likewise new and unique among the competition was the BMW Head-Up Display, which projects driving-related information onto the windscreen directly in the driver's field of view. Standard specifications for the BMW 3 Series now also included the Driving Experience Control switch as well as air conditioning. For added convenience, Real Time Traffic Information and hands-free tailgate operation were part of the package, among other features. Enhanced safety came courtesy of the optional Active Protection and Intelligent Emergency Call with automatic vehicle location.

The new BMW mid-size class: six variants, two model ranges.

The new BMW 3 Series Sedan matches the model's hallmark sporting elegance on the outside with an even greater array of interior features than before. The flat headlights stretching to the BMW kidney grille lend the front view a striking aspect, while a boost in both length (+ 93 millimetres) and wheelbase (+ 50 millimetres) grants extra legroom to the rear-seat passengers in particular. Track width has gained 37 millimetres at the front and 47 at the back, adding to the car's sporty appearance as well as its agile, dynamic handling.

The new BMW 3 Series Touring launched in August 2012 similarly boasts a considerably larger interior, with luggage compartment volume increased to 495 litres. By folding down the 40:20:40-split rear seat backrests, this can

be increased up to 1,500 litres. Standard equipment now also includes, for the first time, electric tailgate opening and closing.

It wasn't long before the BMW 3 Series model range received yet another impetus, this time in the form of an all-new vehicle concept. Since its inception, the BMW 3 Series Gran Turismo has epitomised a unique combination of sporting elegance and variability. Its distinctive attributes are a coupe-like roofline, four doors with frameless windows, a wheelbase longer than that of the Sedan and Touring models, an active rear spoiler and a slightly raised seating position. In addition to the particularly generous spatial comfort it affords rear-seat passengers, the BMW 3 Series Gran Turismo boasts the biggest ever luggage space for a vehicle in the BMW 3 Series model range: beneath the large, electrically operated tailgate, stowage space extends from 520 to 1,600 litres.

In its latest generation, too, the BMW 3 Series is a byword for driving pleasure in the mid-size vehicle segment. It now shares this status with the BMW 4 Series models. The new edition of the two-door mid-size model was unveiled in early 2013 at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit as the BMW 4 Series Coupe. The following year saw the launch of the BMW 4 Series Convertible, again with a retractable hardtop. BMW's latest concept innovation for the mid-size premium segment comes in the guise of the BMW 4 Series Gran Coupe. Dynamically stretched contours, four doors and a large tailgate ensure that this model stands out in its class on grounds of aesthetics and practicality alike.

Engines: BMW TwinPower Turbo technology with four and six cylinders.

The petrol and diesel engines on offer for the sixth-generation BMW 3 Series and the BMW 4 Series all feature BMW TwinPower Turbo technology. The Sedan entered the market with a four-cylinder and six-cylinder petrol engine as well as a four-cylinder diesel unit. Also available from the start was the highly economical BMW 320d EfficientDynamics Edition, posting average fuel consumption of 4.1 litres per 100 kilometres (68.9 mpg imp). Before the first sales year had ended, further engines were added, as was the BMW 3 Series ActiveHybrid. This first hybrid in the BMW 3 Series model range is powered by a six-in-line petrol engine and an electric motor with a combined system output of 250 kW/340 hp.

The BMW 3 Series Sedan alone, meanwhile, offered a choice of four petrol and six diesel engines spanning an output range of 85 kW/116 hp to 230 kW/313 hp. Seven of these can also be combined with the xDrive intelligent all-wheel-drive system. A broad engine portfolio and xDrive are also

available for all further variants of the BMW 3 Series and BMW 4 Series. Another innovation in the new model generation gives the BMW 4 Series Convertible the option of power transfer to all four wheels.

Optimised chassis technology, reduced weight.

Credit for the advances in agility, dynamics and ride comfort ushered in by the latest generation goes to its further developed chassis technology and intelligent lightweight design. Take the new BMW 3 Series Sedan, for example, which made its debut around 40 kilograms lighter than its predecessor despite having expanded in size and equipment range.

Both the double-joint spring-strut front axles and the multi-link rear axle have been systematically honed in terms of lightweight design and rigidity. In conjunction with Electric Power Steering, rear-wheel drive and a balanced axle load distribution of 50:50, the ideal conditions were in place for even more precise and safer handling. Variable sport steering and electronically controlled dampers are optionally available.

The new model alignment in the mid-size class also impacted on the designation of the high-performance sports cars conceived for this segment by BMW M GmbH. The tradition-swathed model badge BMW M3 has since 2014 been reserved for the high-performance Sedan, while the new editions of the Coupe and Convertible both bear the designation BMW M4. However, this new naming by no means affects their shared yet individually distinctive proximity to motor sport – something vouchsafed above all by the new straight-six high-revving engine with M TwinPower Turbo technology and 317 kW/431 hp that resides in all three models.

8. The BMW 3 Series in motor sport.



The BMW 3 Series has been breathing the rarefied air of motor racing since 1977, when the BMW junior team entered the Deutsche Rennsportmeisterschaft (German motor sport championship). This represented the first step in a commitment to the development of young drivers which continues to bear fruit to this day. Providing the power for the BMW 320 Group 5 racing car was an engine of proven racing pedigree. The 2.0-litre four-cylinder unit with four valves per cylinder had been the dominant force in Formula 2 racing for several years and already developed more than 300 hp as it embarked on its racing life. The cars piloted by up-and-coming BMW junior team drivers Manfred Winkelhock, Marc Surer and Eddie Cheever were designed to explore the upper extremes of lightweight design and torsional rigidity, and – with their huge front and rear wings – provide the ultimate in handling. Their first outing came at the Zolder grand prix race track in Belgium on 13 March 1977, Swiss driver Surer taking victory at the first time of asking in his BMW 320.

In the years that followed, the BMW 3 Series was the car to beat in this class of touring car racing. Top drivers such as Hans-Joachim Stuck and Ronnie Peterson provided frequent demonstrations of their class at the wheel of the 3 Series racer. And Harald Ertl guided a turbo version of the BMW 320 to the Deutsche Rennsportmeisterschaft title crown in 1978. That same year, BMW also won the manufacturers' world championship in the 2.0-litre class.

Successful from the start: the BMW M3.

The second-generation BMW 3 Series provided the basis for a touring car of extraordinary ability. The BMW M3 presented in 1985 was powered by a 147 kW/200 hp four-cylinder engine with four-valve technology. BMW Motorsport GmbH took the chance to develop a racing machine alongside the road-spec car. And with its engine developing around 300 hp at 8,200 rpm, their creation was ready to do battle in the World Touring Car Championship.

1987, the BMW M3's first year in touring car racing, yielded one victory after another as the works cars in the now familiar BMW racing livery wrapped up the three major titles. Roberto Ravaglia was crowned the inaugural touring car world champion, Winfried Vogt was European champion and Eric van de Poele

won the German championship. Ravaglia went on to win the European championship in 1988, the DTM in 1989 and the touring car championship in his native Italy in 1990 on the way to becoming the most successful of all BMW M3 drivers, more so even than Johnny Cecotto. Over a period of five years the BMW M3 reigned supreme over the international touring car scene. A list of honours including the 1987 World Touring Car Championship crown, several European touring car championships, two DTM touring car titles and a plethora of other race wins and championship titles secured its status as the most successful touring car in history.

Success with diesel power as well.

The sporting career of the third-generation BMW 3 Series was littered with races in various countries and championships, some of which were run according to widely differing technical regulations. This meant cars with a variety of modifications and engines lined up on the track between 1993 and 1998. The cars that saw race action ranged from the BMW 3 Series Coupe and Sedan with close-to-series body (powered by a 2.0-litre four-cylinder engine with around 300 hp) to a heavily modified BMW M3. In the 24-hour race at the Nürburgring in 1998, a BMW 320d with a 200 hp turbodiesel engine pulled off an amazing achievement to claim overall victory. It was the first time a diesel car had won this classic race.

A four-door Sedan again provided the basis for the racing version of the 3 Series, as the fourth-generation car entered touring car and endurance competition. As well as a number of national championships, BMW was focusing its attention on the European touring car championship and later the World Touring Car Championship. In 2005 BMW was crowned champion in the newly-fledged World Touring Car Championship courtesy of the BMW 320i. Andy Priaulx wrapped up the victory to become the second touring car world champion ever after fellow BMW man Roberto Ravaglia. Meanwhile, BMW was also giving an impressive account of itself in endurance racing with the BMW M3 GTR, notably in wrapping up one-two victories in the Nürburgring 24 Hours in 2004 and 2005, as well as in the American Le Mans Series (ALMS).

In 2009 the next generation of the BMW M3 lined up to fight it out in the ALMS. Its V8 engine was pumped up to 485 hp and made its debut in the Sebring 12-hour race. A successful start to its racing life ensured the BMW M3 would also see race action in Europe the following year, including outings in the 24-hour races at the Nürburgring, Le Mans and Spa-Francorchamps. Overall victory at the Nürburgring (BMW's 19th in all) was joined by a class win at Spa.

DTM comeback produces a trio of triumphs – and the BMW M4 continues the story of success.

Exactly 25 years on from the BMW M3's maiden victory in touring car racing, Canadian driver Bruno Spengler got BMW back to winning ways in the DTM at the second race weekend of the 2012 season. BMW had returned to the DTM at the start of the season after an absence of more than 20 years. The comeback ended with success on three fronts for BMW, Team Schnitzer Motorsport and Bruno Spengler: the BMW M3 DTM ensured a clean sweep of the manufacturers', team and drivers' standings.

The latest chapter in the BMW 3 Series' story of racing success was written in 2014 by the successor to the BMW M3 DTM. German driver Marco Wittmann drove the BMW M4 DTM to victory – BMW's 60th DTM win in total – in the opening race at Hockenheim. And the season finished with Wittmann celebrating as the youngest DTM champion in the history of the race series. Victory in the 2014 team standings was likewise secured with the BMW M4 DTM.

Another noteworthy aspect of the BMW 3 Series' racing history has been provided by the art world. In 1977 US artist Roy Lichtenstein put his very personal stamp on a BMW 320 to add model number three to the BMW Art Car Collection compiled by world-renowned artists. In 1989 Australians Michael Jagamara Nelson and Ken Done added one BMW M3 each to the Collection, and the fourth Art Car based on the BMW 3 Series was unveiled in 1992 when Italian Sandro Chia decorated the prototype of a BMW racing touring car. In 2010 American artist Jeff Koons used a BMW M3 GT2 as his canvas to create the 17th and currently most recent member of an automotive collection of art without parallel around the world.