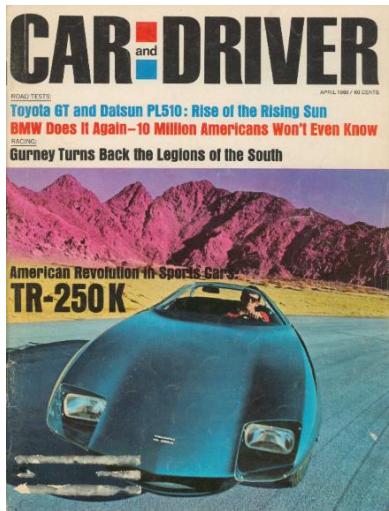


Can one magazine article change the course of automotive history? Though it's hard to imagine in today's fractured media landscape, that's exactly what happened in April 1968, when *Car and Driver* published "[Turn Your Hymnals to 2002](#)," an ecstatic review of a new BMW by contributing writer David E. Davis Jr.



"To my way of thinking, the 2002 is one of modern civilization's all-time best ways to get somewhere sitting down," Davis wrote. "The minute it starts moving, you know that Fangio and Moss and Tony Brooks and all those other big racing studs retired only because they feared that someday you'd have one of these, and when that day came, you'd be indomitable. They were right. You are indomitable."

Driving the unassuming little 2002, Davis blows away nearly everything else on the road, from a six-cylinder Mustang to a Pontiac GTO, while leaving British sports cars and even Porsches behind in the curves. "Grovel, Morgan. Slink home with your tail between your legs, MG-B. Hide in the garage when you see a BMW coming. If you have to race with something, pick a sick kid on an old bicycle."

Even more surprising, BMW's new two-door was not only sportier than the so-called sports cars but more practical, as well.

"The BMW 2002 may be the first car in history to successfully bridge the gap between the diametrically-opposed automotive requirements of the wildly romantic car nut, on one hand, and the hyper pragmatic people at *Consumer Reports*, on the other. Enthusiasts' cars invariably come off second-best in a *CU* evaluation, because such high-spirited steeds often tend to be all desire and no protein—more Magdalen than Mom," Davis wrote.

Not so the 2002. "It rides like a dream. It has a surprising amount of room inside. It gets great gas mileage. It's finished, inside and out, like a Mercedes-Benz, but it doesn't cost very much. All those qualifications are designed to earn the BMW a permanent place in the *Consumer* Hall of Fame. But for the enthusiasts—at the same time, and without even stepping into a phone booth to change costume—it goes like bloody hell and handles like the original bear."

A year earlier, the magazine had declared BMW's 1600-2 "the best \$2,500 sedan *Car and Driver* ever tested." With the larger and more powerful 2.0-liter engine, the 2002 became, as Davis wrote, "most certainly the best \$2,850 sedan in the whole cotton-picking world."

It was also one of the most obscure, especially in America. BMW hadn't officially exported its cars to the US prior to World War II, and only a few were imported by private customers. During the Occupation, American service members discovered sporty BMWs like the 328 and 327, but they didn't bring enough of these cars home to make much of an impact. BMW's postwar product strategy didn't increase the marque's visibility during the 1950s, and neither did its disjointed distribution system. While Fred Oppenheimer's Fadex Corporation had a short-term success with the Isetta microcar, Max Hoffman failed to find an audience for BMW's V8-powered 507, or any of the other models aimed at the American car buyer. The early-'60s Neue Klasse sedan and 2000 CS coupe didn't hit the mark, either. In 1966, BMW sold just 1,253 cars in the United States.

All of that would change following the launch of the small two-door known within BMW as the Type 114. Thanks in part to *Car and Driver*'s assessment of the 1600-2, BMW's US sales nearly quadrupled in 1967, reaching a total of 4,564 cars. Nearly all were 1600-2s.

Despite that increase, BMW remained little-known even among foreign-car enthusiasts...until the April 1968 issue of *Car and Driver* landed in subscribers' mailboxes. As one of the Big Three automotive publications along with *Road & Track* and *Motor Trend*, *Car and Driver* had around one million subscribers, many of whom were looking for a car exactly like the one Davis described in "Turn Your Hymnals to 2002."

"If you'd asked me about BMW, I couldn't have told you what it was," said Rob Mitchell, then a Marine Corpsman stationed in Washington, DC. "And then this issue of *Car and Driver* shows up in my mailbox, with an article about the 2002. I was like, 'Wow! This car sounds like the best of everything.' It was the answer to my prayers, and it was even affordable." He'd end up buying a 1600-2, and he'd also become one of the first employees hired by BMW of North America in 1975.

Davis's stirring prose made a similar impression on Michael Izor, then a junior accountant at WLVI-TV in Boston. "If your blood doesn't start to boil a bit when you read that article, get *Reader's Digest* and call it a day!" Izor laughed. "I was one of those fat-assed American car guys, and here comes this pocket rocket that sounds just fabulous. I went to the local dealership and asked for a test drive, and I was so delighted I placed an order for a 2002 immediately." He'd become an early member of the BMW Car Club of America, attending its annual Oktoberfest for 50 years running.

Davis had estimated that the 2002 would find a home with "10,000 well-adjusted enthusiasts who want a good car, people with the sense of humor to enjoy its giant-killing performance and the taste to appreciate its mechanical excellence."

He wasn't far off. In 1968, BMW's US sales hit 9,172 units, and in 1969 they reached 11,638, a figure that was limited more by the production capacity of BMW's Munich factory than by demand. After a decade of trying, BMW finally had a hit in the US, and anywhere else the 2002 was sold.

As for David E. Davis Jr., "Turn Your Hymnals to 2002" cemented his reputation as one of America's finest and most influential automotive journalists. It also got him fired from *Car and Driver*, thanks to his complaint that the 2002's radio—made by *Car and Driver* advertiser Blaupunkt—"couldn't pick up a Manhattan station from the far end of the Brooklyn Bridge."

He took a job with advertising agency Campbell and Ewald, then returned to *Car and Driver* in 1976, this time as editor in chief. In that role, he'd write still more favorable reviews of BMW automobiles, and he'd also move *Car and Driver* headquarters from New York City to Ann Arbor, Michigan. There, Davis petitioned the city to renumber the magazine's new office building as 2002 Hogback Road, slightly out-of-sequence on the street grid but a fine homage to the car that made his career, and which put BMW on the radar of discerning American enthusiasts.

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