

can't resist reiterating our conviction that the chassis is what this car is all about. There is a balance of handling that's leagues ahead of most other sports sedans, the steering is wonderfully precise with excellent road feel and is neither too quick nor too slow. Pushing the 320i hard into a very tight turn still causes it to lift the inside rear wheel, but not so much that it's disconcerting, and on your favorite bit of twisty road you'd find the car a true delight. The mild and balanced understeer prevalent in normal driving makes a smooth transition to neutrality when the speed goes up and the corners get tighter. In our slalom test, the neutrality gives way to slight oversteer traits, a common characteristic of semi-trailing-arm rear suspension. A further testimonial to the excellent chassis is apparent in the 320i's ride characteristics: smooth, well controlled over rough pavement and dips, and firmly supple on freeways and city streets;

Occupant comfort has been improved for the new model year, most notably in the revised ventilation system. Where there used to be only dash-top vents there are now additional outlets mounted in the face of the dash to provide an ample flow of fresh air. One new feature that we appreciated is a vertically sliding lever that controls the volume of outside air so the driver can mix fresh and heated air in infinitely variable proportions.

The instrument panel and dash area are nicely finished and functional looking, as is the rest of the interior, causing some staffers to praise the efficiency of the interior design, while others

damn it as cold and lacking personality. Pro or con, everyone agrees the instruments are eminently readable but we are all put off by the new federal regulation pertaining to speedometers reading only up to 85 mph—the result in the 320i is that the tachometer and speedometer are virtually indistinguishable at a glance. Another feature that's much appreciated is the subdued easy-on-the-eyes reddish-orange instrument panel lighting.

The driving position is excellent in the small BMW, as the individual cloth-covered front seats are supportive in nearly all directions and have a wide range of adjustments. Outward vision is almost unlimited all around, thanks to the tall greenhouse which also gives rear-seat passengers less of a hemmed-in feeling than in many 2-door sedans. One of the minor annoyances that seems to plague every 320i with a sunroof is soiling of the headliner from the lubricant that oils the mechanism. At least one staff member found the headliner itself rather cheap looking as well, especially for a car in this price range.

Summing up the 320i is child's play: superb ride and handling characteristics, crisp gearbox, well thought-out controls, comfortable seats and an engine that's relatively responsive while meeting emission levels and fuel economy standards for the new decade. As one editor noted in the logbook, "It feels good to get behind the wheel of a proper motor car, a product of intelligent design and not happenstance." The enthusiast who takes driving seriously will feel very much at home in the BMW 320i.

PRICE

List price, all POE.....	\$11,465
Price as tested.....	\$13,025
Price as tested includes sunroof (\$510), alloy wheels (\$455), AM/FM stereo/cassette (\$595)	

GENERAL

Curb weight, lb/kg	2435	1105
Test weight	2625	1192
Weight dist (with driver), fr, %		54/46
Wheelbase, in./mm./100.9		2563
Track, front/rear	54.6/55.0	1387/1397
length	177.5	4509
Width	63.4	1610
Height	54.3	1379
Trunk space, cu ft/liters	12.6	357
Fuel capacity, U.S. gal./liters	15.3	58

ENGINE

Type	sohc inline 4	
Bore x stroke, in./mm	3.15 x 2.79	80.0 x 70.9
Displacement, cu in./cc	108	1766
Compression ratio	8.8:1	
Bhp @ rpm, SAE net/kW	101/175 @ 5800	
Torque @ rpm, lb-ft/Nm	100/136 @ 4500	
Fuel injection	Bosch K-Jetronic	
Fuel requirement	unleaded, 91-oct	

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission	5-sp manual
Gear ratios: 5th (0.80)	3.13:1
4th (1.00)	3.91:1
3rd (1.33)	5.20:1
2nd (2.00)	7.82:1
1st (3.68)	14.39:1
Final drive ratio	3.91:1

CHASSIS & BODY

layout	front engine/rear drive
Body/frame	unit steel
Brake system ..	1Q.0-in. (254-mm) vented discs front, 9.8 x 1.6-in. (249 x 40-mm) drums rear; vacuum assisted
Wheels	cast alloy, 13 x 5HJ
Tires	Michelin XVS, 185/70HR-13
Steering type	rack & pinion
Turns, lock-to-lock	4.1
Suspension, front/rear:	MacPherson struts, lower lateral links, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar
	semi-trailing arms, coil springs, tube shocks

CALCULATED DATA

lb/bhp (test weight)	26.0
Mph/1000 rpm (5th gear)	21.1
Engine revs/mi (60 mph)	2850
R&T steering index	1.38
Brake swept area, sq in./ton	223

ROAD TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION

Time to distance, see:	
{ }-100ft.....	3.6
0-500 ft.....	9.7
0-1320 ft (% mil)	18.0
Speed at end of % mi, mph	77.0
Time to speed, see:	
0-30 mph	3.6
0-50 mph	7.7
0-60 mph	11.1
0-70 mph	15.0
0-80 mph	19.7
0-90 mph	29.5

SPEEDS IN GEARS

5th gear (5200 rpm).....	109
4th (6400).....	109
3rd (6400).....	80
2nd (6400).....	54
1st (6400).....	29

FUEL ECONOMY

Normal driving, mpg	26.0
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BRAKES

Minimum stopping distances, ft:	
From 60 mph	169
From 80 mph	282
Control in panic stop	good
Pedal effort for 0.5g stop, lb	22
Fade: percent increase in pedal effort to maintain 0.5g deceleration in 6 stops from 60 mph	nil
Overall brake rating	good

HANDLING

lateral accel, 100-11 radius, g ..	0.743
Speed thru 700-ft slalom, mph	58.6

INTERIOR NOISE

Constant 30 mph, dBA	62
50 mph	69
70 mph	75

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph indicated is actually	28.0
60 mph	57.5

ACCELERATION

