



LIFESTYLE

TIM BARNES-CLAY

Cars

Faster and Faster

Motoring journalist Tim Barnes-Clay drives the latest BMW 3 Series, before the less-than-discreet Porsche 911 Carrera 4 GTS grabs his attention...

BMW 3 Series

There is a lot of media attention around the 2015 BMW 3 Series at the moment. That's because the range has been given an update, consisting of sexier lights, fresh bumpers, new engines and a vaguely tweaked cabin.

Out of the 3 Series line-up, the £33,635 320d M Sport automatic is especially important. This is because, traditionally, it's the sports saloon of choice in the UK.

Its 2.0 turbo diesel engine produces 187bhp and gives the car a significant turn of speed. And when you counterbalance its 0-62mph

sprint of 7.2 seconds and 146mph top speed with an official combined average of 67.3mpg, it's hard to find anything to complain about.

I decided to test this very car by driving to the UK from Spain. I was already holidaying with my family down on the Costa Blanca, so I figured instead of flying back to →



appreciated the four-door saloon's ability to 'live on the motorway'. On top of that, the flexibility of the ride, the excellent Sat Nav and the seats (apart from the middle bench area – but more about that in a second) amounted to long-haul paradise – for me and our three kids, anyway.

The only gripe during our 1,300 mile journey was about the aforementioned rear centre seat. My wife found it too firm and got a bit bruised from a seatbelt stalk that kept digging into her thigh. The only reason she was sat there is because our two-year-old settled far better with Mummy next to her. The other two took it in turns to either sit in the back or ride up front with me.

As implied earlier, the 320d M Sport is more than capable of pounding flat out across Europe hour after hour. The BMW will gobble up unoccupied stretches of bitumen at 140mph, no shakes. This halves the official fuel consumption figure, but when it's 2pm on a Sunday on the Continent and the school term starts at 9am on Monday in Britain, it's incredible how little you care about the car doing sub-40mpg.

With the Eurotunnel taking only 35 minutes, I had to rapidly remember that back in the UK, my higher-than-you'd-risk-in-Britain motorway pace needed reigning in, big time.

Now, with all five of us back home safely, I can only conclude that the 2015 BMW 320d M Sport Saloon is one of the most awe-inspiring compact executive motors ever. Yes, perhaps a Touring version of the 3 Series might have given us a bit more luggage space, but the car we had is still a decent family machine – and one I'd happily cross large swathes of Europe in again.

Britain, why not bring my wife and three young children home courtesy of BMW?

But first, I had to fly up to BMW's media launch event near Bilbao, and then drive the 320d solo back to Denia, north of Alicante, to finish building sandcastles with the kids. That was 400 miles; so, with the 1,300 miles back home, I was looking at a total of 1,700 miles behind the wheel of the BMW 320d M Sport.

Having not stopped for fuel on my six-hour charge from northern Spain, my five-year-old son was first out of the door on my arrival at our

rented holiday home. He enthusiastically told me how much he loved the look of "our" new car. I couldn't help but agree. That's because, whether you're five or 65, BMW's M Sport package draws the eye. The dropped sport suspension, dynamic front and rear bumpers, and large 19-inch alloy wheels are befittingly aggressive, while inside there are leather seats, as well as climate control and those all-important 'M' symbols.

The next day, we crammed our luggage, including a buggy, into the BMW's boot and quickly

PROS 'N' CONS

- Appearance ✓
- Power ✓
- Efficiency ✓
- Driving enjoyment ✓
- Rear middle seat ✗

FAST FACTS

Max speed:

146mph

0-62mph:

7.2 secs

Combined mpg:

67.3

Engine layout:

1995cc, four cylinder, turbodiesel

Max power (bhp):

187

Max torque (lb ft):

295

CO2:

116g/km

Price:

£33,635





Porsche 911 Carrera 4 GTS

I was followed by the police the other day. Not because they like me or anything – I suspect it was more to do with the yellow and black Porsche 911 I was in.

Funnily enough, I'm not in the habit of driving like a boy racer now I'm in my 40s, and getting a ban for speeding isn't a great career move if you're a motoring journalist. So, doing 30mph through town with my five-year-old son strapped to his booster chair in the passenger seat was hardly the dodgiest thing to be doing on a Sunday.

I'm not being paranoid, the cops were going the other way and then did a 360 around the roundabout and tailed me for the next couple of miles, before deciding I wasn't a risk to the good people of Northamptonshire.

It could be my cynicism, and I'm not suggesting these boys in blue were frittering away our taxes, but I do think they had more of an interest in the blisteringly beautiful Carrera GTS. And who can blame them? It's an absolute stunner – whichever colour it's cloaked in.

The 911, under scrutiny here, has far more to it than looks, though. The GTS badge stands for Gran Turismo Sport – and, on this model, brings a 10mm drop in ride height. There are also an additional 30

horses tethered to the 3.8-litre flat six lump, producing 424bhp in total. Other extras tossed in to give the GTS extra effervescence include bi-xenon lamps, Sat Nav, limited slip diff and Porsche Torque Vectoring.

The rear of this 911 is broader, too, giving it a really aggressive stance – especially with matt black 20-inch wheels fitted at each corner. They

look fantastic, particularly against yellow. Porsche anoraks will also note that the four exhaust pipes and headlight surrounds are finished in the same shade.

The interior is typical Porsche design, but highlights are the GTS badges woven into the seats, and body coloured stitching on the Alcantara trim. The carbon fibre →

“BEHIND THE WHEEL, THE GTS FEELS SPADES MORE SPORTING THAN A STANDARD CARRERA S.”



**“ZERO TO 62MPH ARRIVES IN
JUST 4.0 SECONDS AND THE
TOP SPEED IS 188MPH.”**



on the doors, dash, seat base and console looks stunning, too.

Behind the wheel, the GTS feels spades more sporting than a standard Carrera S. I drove the big-ticket Carrera 4 GTS that was fitted with Porsche's optional seven-speed, double-clutch transmission. It's the gearbox to have, because it provides a seamless shift between manual and automatic control, so you lose virtually no power when changing gear. The '4', referred to above, simply indicates that the car has a four-wheel drive system. This delivers terrific

traction, allowing you to get on the power quicker out of a corner.

Indeed, the performance of the sports coupe is extraordinary. With the rapid changing auto transmission, the 911 Carrera 4 GTS drives as awesomely as it looks. The ride and handling is incisive, while the precision of the steering is second to none.

Zero to 62mph arrives in just 4.0 seconds and the top speed is 188mph. The sport exhaust adds roars and grumbles and those quad tailpipes emit a crackly howl during gear shifts. The 911 soaks up bumps

and mid-range pull is addictive. Certainly, the car's performance flirts above legal limits enough to keep you on your toes.

Quite honestly, the Porsche 911 Carrera 4 GTS is everything a sports coupe should be. It's pricey, though, so you'll need deep pockets to buy one. ■

Tim is an experienced motoring writer with a background in radio and TV journalism. He puts his pedal to the metal each issue with his must-read car reviews. Visit carwriteups.co.uk.

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PROS 'N' CONS

- Power ✓
- Looks ✓
- Thrills ✓
- Grip ✓
- Dear X

FAST FACTS

Max speed:

189mph

0-62mph:

4.0 secs

Combined mpg:

32.5

Engine layout:

3800cc,

six cylinder, petrol

Max power (bhp):

424

Max torque (lb ft):

325

CO2:

233g/km

Price:

£95,862

