

New BMW 640i Convertible



Written by
Tim Barnes-Clay, Motoring Journalist
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I am convinced I was the envy of many a motorist every time I pulled up at the lights in BMW's latest 6 Series Convertible.

Heads seemed to swivel in my direction and kids tugged at their dad's sleeve and pointed when I drove down the high street. I'm pretty sure it had everything to do with the beautiful 640i I was driving and nothing to do with me.

Who can blame anyone for wanting to take in the majesty of the new



Fast Facts

- Max speed: 155mph
- 0-62 mph: 5.7secs
- Combined mpg: 35.8
- Max. power (hp): 320
- Max. torque (Nm): 450
- CO2: 185g/km

Price:
£65,695
On the road

drop-top Beamer? From the long sweeping bonnet to the unique fins of the soft-top, the car is a work of art. Complementing the fins is the 'shark nose' with a large, forward-slanted BMW kidney grille, broad air intakes, wide, contoured bonnet and muscular wheel arches. The whole effect is mesmerising.

Inside the 6 Series I felt instantly at ease behind the wheel. The car is very driver-focused yet comforting and enveloping. It's also a treat to travel in for anyone joining you on

a trip. Typically 2+2 convertibles are compromised in the back, but passengers in the rear seats of the 6 have decent legroom and fellow travellers will be able to access the rear easily - a brief tap of a switch automatically moves the seats as far forward as possible.

Speaking of switches, the automatic opening and closing operation for the black canvas roof is easily activated using a button on the centre console. It only takes seconds to open or close. Both operations can

be activated while on the move at speeds of up to 25mph - something I was grateful for when the heavens unexpectedly opened during a roof-down trip through town.

The 3.0-litre six-cylinder in-line engine in the 640i enables a zero to 62mph sprint of just 5.7 seconds and, where legal, the car will go on to reach 155mph. The car literally snaps your head backwards when you floor it, yet, despite the cheek-wobbling acceleration, the BMW feels safe, composed and smooth at all times.

Even more remarkable, considering all its power and might, are its efficiency figures. The BMW 640i Convertible achieves 35.8mpg on the combined cycle, while CO2 emissions are only 185g/km.

Of course, large, luxurious and sporting convertibles need to come packed with toys for the driver, and the BMW doesn't disappoint. Apart from the usual decent BMW music-media entertainment package (which can keep everyone in the car occupied for hours trying to work out how to use it), the 6 Series Convertible comes with Drive Dynamic Control, which allows you to choose how responsive you want the gears, steering and throttle to be. It's a brilliant laugh toggling between the different settings and it makes the thrill of driving the 640i Convertible even sweeter.

Add BMW's standard eight-speed Sport automatic gearbox to the mix and you have a car that is not far short of perfect. Its wide range of ratios offers the perfect balance of strong sprinting performance, refined high speed cruising and low speed efficiency.

This is a car that should not be dismissed if a sophisticated four-seater soft-top is what you are in the market for - if you have the money!



MINI Countryman Cooper SD All4

Four-wheel drive is useful for motorists, but it isn't necessarily needed all the time, so MINI has a smart and fuel efficient answer for this conundrum: the Countryman All4.

The car is a 'crossover' - a front-wheel drive car in most normal circumstances, but when wheel slip on the front wheels is detected, or if the car is being driven enthusiastically, a special clutch engages drive to the rear wheels to

improve traction. It's useful, not to mention reassuring, if you're driving in wet, muddy or snowy conditions.

The Cooper SD version of the Countryman, under review here, is the most powerful diesel variant in the MINI line-up. As well as four-wheel drive capability, its 2.0 litre 143bhp engine offers a 0-62mph sprint of 9.4 seconds and bags of pulling power. In this guise, the car is also capable of towing up to 1000kg on a braked trailer, making it a rather multi-talented motor.

Looks-wise, the Countryman has a familiar MINI appearance, albeit distinctly different to any that have gone before. The front is very upright, projecting a confident 'face', and it is longer, wider and higher, offering more luggage capacity

than a MINI Hatch. In addition, the SD model has a front apron with an extra large air intake and an air scoop on the bonnet. At the rear, the car sports twin exhaust tailpipes exiting in the centre of the rear apron and an eye-catching roof spoiler.

Inside, the car is dominated by iconic design characteristics such as grippy sports seats, the trademark central speedometer and neat, funky switch packs. A nifty further feature is the MINI centre rail which runs from front to rear instead of a conventional centre console. It opens up new options for integrating all kinds of storage boxes, cup holders, power chargers, music players, mobile phones and other accessories. However, the Countryman is as much about comfort and traditional practicality as it is innovative

style. From the four wide-opening doors to the high-opening rear hatch, it is easy to get into and out of and a dream to load.

The MINI Countryman could prove to be a popular choice of car because the demand for crossover vehicles has grown considerably recently. Many drivers want the best of both

worlds: normal saloon-like driving responses as well as the added convenience of soft off-road ability and the interior flexibility to cope with all the activities that are part of busy modern life. The Cooper SD All4 appears to tick all these boxes and certainly shows that practicality and versatility does not limit the pleasure that can be derived from driving.



Fast Facts

- Max speed: 121 mph
- 0-62 mph: 9.4 seconds
- Combined mpg: 57.6
- Max. power (hp): 143 at 4000 rpm
- Max. torque (Nm): 225 at 1750-2700 rpm
- CO2: 130 g/km

Price:
£23,190
On the road



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