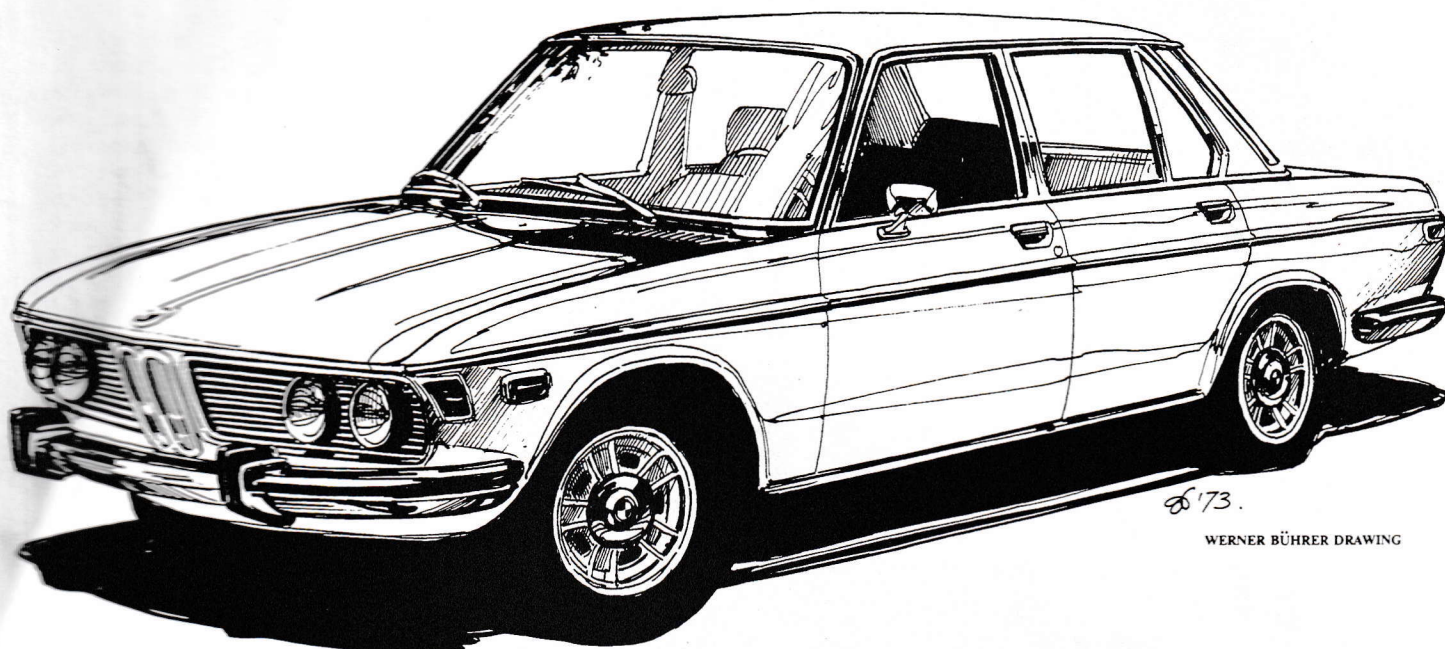


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Road & Track Owner Survey



BMW 2800, BAVARIA & CS

112 owners report on the 6-cylinder BMWs

UNTIL 1969 MERCEDES had the German market for big, fast sedans pretty much to itself. That year two serious new competitors for well-heeled Germans' money were introduced, the redesigned Opel Diplomat and the 6-cylinder BMWs. Opel doesn't sell its big cars in the U.S. but BMW had the U.S. market very much in mind and the cars were introduced here shortly after appearing in Europe.

At first there were three models: the 2500 sedan, with a 2.5-liter version of the inline single-overhead-cam six and relatively plain upholstery and equipment; the 2800 sedan, bodily like the 2500 but with much fancier trim and equipment including leather upholstery and Nivomat self-leveling rear shocks; and the 2800CS, a coupe based on the earlier 4-cylinder 2000CS but with a new front end and the 2.8-liter engine of the 2800 sedan. The 2500 listed for about \$5300, the 2800 for about \$1000 more and the CS for yet another \$1000-plus.

In 1971 an interesting marketing realignment eliminated the 2500 and 2800 as separate models and replaced both with a 2.8-engine sedan called the Bavaria. With trim like that of the 2500 and the 2800's engine, the Bavaria was offered for the bargain price of \$5000, though options most customers would want put the price of a typically equipped Bavaria closer to

\$6000. No matter—it was still a bargain, and sales of the 6-cylinder sedans in the U.S. took off.

For 1972 both the Bavaria and the coupe got an enlarged engine of an even 3 liters; the Bavaria's name remained the same but the coupe became 3.0CS.

Today's Bavaria and 3.0CS remain unchanged from the 1972s except as required by government regulations.

Though we had a good stock of questionnaires filled out by owners of 2500s, we decided to eliminate them and concentrate on the cars more closely related to today's BMW offerings in the U.S. This left us with a good sample of 112 owners of 2800s, Bavarias and CSs: three 1969 2800s; seven 1970 2800s and seven 2800CSs; 11 1971 2800s, 41 Bavaria 2.8s and 12 2800CSs; 29 1972 Bavaria 3.0s and two 3.0CSs.

It's not unusual for us to find a preponderance of professional people among the owners of imported cars we survey, and since the big BMWs are expensive this seems even more predictable. A car as "engineered" as these BMWs, with a certain emphasis on precision and efficiency as well as features like overhead camshaft, dual carburetors, all-around independent suspension and disc brakes, is also bound to appeal to engineers. But they also appeal to doctors, and these two professions were the ones

most often mentioned. Next came managers, then businessmen who own their own companies, and then military people (most of whom are stationed overseas). The average age of our respondents was 36 years; the youngest was 16 years old and the oldest a mere 64. Sales of imported makes are always strongest at the two coasts, and the two states most frequently given as home were California and New York. Other strongholds for BMW sixes were Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. Three of our respondents live in Canada.

Optional equipment ordered by these owners for their big BMWs may surprise both other R&T readers and Hoffman Motors. Fully 79% of these R&T readers ordered air conditioning and 78% took power steering, standard on 2800s and the coupes but optional on the Bavarias. Automatic transmission was on 22% of the cars. Other options, like AM/FM radio, stereo radio or tape player, and limited-slip differential, occurred in smaller numbers. Hoffman Motors has some options that are in fact mandatory and there was some criticism of the distributor for misleading advertising on the Bavaria in that one without options (and hence available at the list price) was hard to find. But there were a few Bavarias in our survey that didn't have a single option, so they must have been available.

Nearly all these cars were purchased new, and over half of them were bought by people who own other cars—indicating to us that most people who buy expensive cars don't stretch their budgets to the limit to buy them. Our owners also use their BMWs a lot: 55% of them drive between 15,000 and 25,000 miles per year, well over the national average of annual mileage, and fully 17% of them drive more than 25,000 miles per year. The average odometer reading for all cars surveyed was 20,600 miles; the highest was 72,000 miles and we had five cars with over 50,000 on their odometers.

These owners drive their cars the natural way to drive a BMW: hard. Only Ferrari and Lotus drivers have told us they push their cars harder. There's a certain aggressive character about the way these cars perform, hard to define or describe. One owner said, "The harder I drive it, the more it seems to like it—I like to listen to the engine when it's put to work." Another, not so happy with the way his Bavaria ran at city speeds, said, "It refuses to be driven less than hard." So we had a hard-driven bunch of cars.

But they're also a well-cared-for bunch. Eighty percent of the BMW owners follow BMW's rigorous preventive maintenance schedule, which calls for a minor service every 4000 miles and a major one every 8000 (including a full engine tuneup). This sort of service is expensive but the BMW owners' adherence to the schedule has been exceeded only by Audi owners in our series of surveys. Another 8% of the owners follow the schedule "mostly" and 12% decide on their own when to have service done and how much. As religiously as they follow BMW's routine, however, 10% of the owners do complain that it's an expensive thing.

Dealers & Service

IF THEY complain of expensive service, they don't complain much about bad service. Once again—this is our second BMW owner survey—BMW dealers have come through with a remarkably good rating from their customers. An amazing 37% of our respondents rated their service excellent—the only make whose dealers approached this performance was Audi with 28%. Another 29% rated their dealers good, and adding these together we have 66% of the BMW dealers obviously satisfying what must be a demanding group of owners. (R&T readers and owners of German cars—what else?) When we surveyed BMW 1600 and 2002 owners in 1969 this figure was almost the same—65%—but then only 12% of the dealers were called excellent. On the negative end, 15% of the BMW dealers were rated poor, a low (good) reading for this category.

It's our custom to name the dealers that got excellent rating. Not all the owners gave names, but we can list these: Hyde Park Motors, Los Angeles; BMW Auto Zentrum, San Rafael, Calif.; Tulsa BMW, Tulsa; Foreign Car Clinic, Dobbs Ferry,

N.Y.; Great Neck Imports, Great Neck, N.Y.; Hafkemeyer of Kansas City; Ott & Burger, Williamstown, Mass.; Fritz's, Trenton, N.J.; Nemet Motors, Jamaica, N.Y. (an independent, not a dealer); Trans-Atlantic Motors, New York City; Jaksich of Sacramento, Calif.; Webster Motor Service, Kirkwood, Mo.; A&E Motors, London, Ontario, Canada; and O.E. Haring Inc, New Orleans.

A happy and rare situation.

Why a BMW?

IT WAS clear from what our owners told us in response to the question "What particular features influenced your choice of this make and model?" that most of them wanted a roomy sedan with sporting qualities. Only 13% of them actually said it this way, but then 47% of them said "handling," 61% said "performance" (or "engine") and 20% said "comfort." Of the 21 coupe owners a similar percentage—19%—quoted comfort as a reason for purchase. One Bavaria owner put it: "On the way to work it's a sports car. When transporting business associates it's a luxury sedan."

Other influencing factors were the assumption of high quality (quoted by 28%), styling (15% of the sedan owners and 28% of the coupe owners, logically), the BMW reputation or previous BMW ownership (13%), compact size (9%), and what they read in an R&T road test (9%). A few (6%) mentioned that the BMW was an alternate to Mercedes. And 14% of the Bavaria owners said they were attracted by its price.

Best Features

NORMALLY THE Best Features blank on the questionnaire looks pretty much like the influencing features listed above, and this was true here too. Handling came in first among the favorite qualities, 58% of the owners listing it in some form. Performance came next, 49% noting it, and a performance-related item—fuel economy—came next with 16% of the owners praising the BMW engine's remarkable fuel economy or the long cruising range these cars have on a tank of gasoline. One owner said he got 23.5 mpg with his 2800—probably a figure from a long trip—but the average for 2800s was close to our own test figure of 19 mpg for the 1970 2800CS. Unfortunately this figure is coming down steadily as the government's emission limits get tighter. Our 1971 2.8 Bavaria did 18 mpg, a 1972 3.0 Bavaria owned by a staff member is doing 17 mpg and the 1973 3.0CS we just tested managed only 16 mpg. It seems, however, that in 1973 16 mpg is just as impressive as 19 was in 1971, and we should remember that today's 3-liter runs on regular fuel whereas the 2.8s needed premium.

Other Best Features mentioned were quality, 13%; comfort, 10%; compact size, 8%; driving pleasure, 7%; reliability, 6%; and safety, 5%. One owner living in the north noted that his 3-liter Bavaria "starts instantly, even at -20 F."

Worst Features

THERE HAS to be a bad side to every car, though, and one thing came out clearly the worst in these BMWs: the air conditioning system. Everyone knows that European cars generally have been far behind the best U.S. practice, but it's paradoxical that even in such expensive cars the customer can't match a Chevrolet's air conditioning. So it is, though, and 31% of those with air conditioning complained of inadequate cooling capacity or poor air distribution. The problem is mainly one of design: there just isn't enough room in the center console of either coupe or sedan for an evaporator of adequate size, and to make up for this one has to run the A/C blower at full (read noisy) speed. It's something the BMW owner just has to put up with.

Next on the Worst list was an item mentioned by far fewer owners: brakes. And since the sedans, at least, have always had highly capable brakes we can only conclude they were unhappy with all the squeaking going on. Some said what their complaint was, others didn't, but this was what was most frequently mentioned and it is a common complaint with disc

brakes designed for high-speed driving. The 2800CS had a second-rate brake system with drums at the rear, and two of the 21 owners of this model reported dissatisfaction with their brakes.

Then came hesitation, stumbles or other maladies of lean carburetion for emission control. Three more things rate mention among Worst Features: the prices of BMW replacement parts, the cost of maintenance, and wind noise (mostly on the Bavarias). Nine percent of the owners didn't think their BMWs had a worst feature.

Problem Areas and Component Life

THIS SECTION is always the nitty-gritty of our surveys. The BMWs are just above average in this respect, with 10 areas of problems afflicting 5% or more of the owners.

First was the cooling system, and the troubles were many—fully 38% of the owners had some problem. The water pump was the worst offender, failing at an average of 32,000 miles in 14% of the cars and continuing to give trouble in the newer 3-liters. Another 9% had thermostat failure, 5% had to have their electric fan clutch replaced (all of these were 3-liters) and 11% had miscellaneous cooling problems like overheating and leaks.

Instruments, commonly a trouble spot, were very much so for the BMW owners. A total of 30% mention was tallied up, the Kienzle clock being the worst offender and the fuel gauge coming next. The manual gearbox, at its best an outstanding feature of the 6-cylinders, is often not at its best and caused problems for 16% of the owners. Weak synchronizers on 2nd gear afflicted 10% of the cars, and though the box was redesigned for the 3-liters the rate of mention remained at that level for them; miscellaneous problems made up the other 6%.

There were brake troubles for 15% of the owners. Most frequent problem was pulling to one side or the other, and interestingly this occurred mainly with the all-disc brakes. Other items: untrue discs, hydraulic trouble and vacuum boosters.

If carburetion didn't rate a Worst Feature for many, it did give a large proportion of the owners trouble. In all, 20% of our respondents mentioned carburetion faults, the majority of them stumbling or hesitating upon acceleration. Faulty behavior of the choke and fast-idle system was mentioned by a few,

and it may be that they were just noting normal operation: on the 2800s the fast idle was too fast, even when everything was working right.

Air conditioning was mentioned as a problem by 16% of those who had it. Most of these had trouble with the system itself and it was unclear to us just how many were simply frustrated with its lack of capacity and how many actually needed repairs. There were only two failures of its electromagnetic cycling clutch.

Miscellaneous electrical problems affected 9% of the cars, but the incidence of trouble with electric windows was somewhat higher than this overall figure. Differential trouble, either mechanical or just lubricant leakage, affected 8% and there were 5% occurrences of starter-flywheel trouble and clutch problems—the latter not counting the clutch overhaul needed at 72,000 miles by the most-used car.

Under the heading of normal replacement items, we found the front brakes capable of just under 20,000 miles on the average before needing new pads, the rears 21,000-plus—neither particularly good. Continental tires went 20,000 miles, Michelin XAS 34,000. Front shocks did 25,000 miles before needing replacement, the regular rear shocks about 14,000; surprisingly, the Nivomat units (which have an evil word-of-mouth reputation) averaged out at nearly 19,000 miles. Sparkplug replacement was done by our owners at an average of 8400 miles, just over the official 8000-mile BMW recommendation. There weren't enough clutch jobs among the 112 cars to get a good average life, which must mean something.

Buy Another?

WITH A record of reliability that looks just above average, the big BMWs come out with a surprisingly low number of potential repeat customers: only 73%, one of the lowest percentages in our series, say they'll buy another BMW. But there was a group of 12% whose decision hangs on how the price situation looks when it's time to trade. With the prices of German cars going as they are now, these people may not be able to afford BMWs again even if they want them. Perhaps their reluctance to repeat has to do with what kind of people they are: as one satisfied sedan owner said, "Life is too short to do the same thing twice!"

SUMMARY: BMW 6-CYLINDERS

New or Used?	Driving Habits	Would They Buy Another?
Bought new 92%	Drivers who said they drive "moderately" 24%	Yes 73%
Bought used 8%	Drivers who said they drive "hard" 62%	No 15%
	Drivers who said they drive "very hard" 14%	Undecided 12%
Annual Mileage	Problem Areas	Five Best Features
5000-10,000 3%	Mentioned by more than 10% of the owners	Handling
10,000-15,000 25%		Performance
15,000-25,000 55%		Fuel Economy
Over 25,000 17%		Quality
How BMW Owners Feel About BMW Service	Cooling System	Comfort
	Instruments	
	Carburetion	
	Brake System	
	Gearbox	
	Air Conditioning	
Rated "excellent" .. 37%	Mentioned by 5-10% of the owners	Five Worst Features
Rated "good" 29%	Electrical System	Air Conditioning
Rated "fair" 15%	Differential	Brakes
Rated "poor" 18%	Owners who reported no problems 11%	Carburetion
		Maintenance Cost
		Wind Noise