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1971 - Road and Track - Bavaria Road Test

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BMW BAVARIA

One of the world's best buys in luxury sedans

 ANY COMMENTS on the price of a German product may be obsolete by the time this is printed, what with the Deutschmark's value so much up in the air. But no upward revaluation anticipated for the DM will be able to wipe out the BMW Bavaria's price advantage over the two models it replaces, the 2500 and 2800 sedans. These 6-cylinder models, currently BMW's largest cars, were introduced in late 1968 as BMW's entry in a field of luxurious high-speed sedans dominated by Mercedes-Benz in Germany. In contrast to comparably priced Mercedes, they were and are a bit less formal, somewhat lighter, faster and quicker, just as roomy, and probably not quite as durable. In other words, their appeal was to someone who wanted something just a bit more sporting in his 4-door sedan.

The 2500 and 2800 never sold as well as BMW hoped, however, and the Munich firm was moved to do some re-adjusting of the 6-cylinder line's price structure. A new version of the car, called "Bavaria" for the U.S. market, was introduced this year; some of the standard equipment of the 2500s and 2800s was taken out, and though both 2.5-liter and 2.8-liter engines remain available in Europe, only the 2.8 is available in the U.S. So the Bavaria is simply a detrimmed 2800, and not very detrimmed at that. The West Coast prices compare thus:

	2500	2800	Bavaria
Basic list	\$5545	\$6874	\$5087

The Bavaria has about the same trim and equipment as the 2500 and the engine of the 2800; so the price reduction is real, as far as we can tell. There is one hooker, though: Hoffman Motors, BMW importer for the U.S., is in the habit of

78 ROAD & TRACK

giving cars low basic prices and then ordering them all with certain "mandatory options." So the Bavaria's price isn't quite as low as it seems. Options brought our test car up to \$6386 including the \$100 preparation charge, and it will be very difficult for any customer to actually get a Bavaria without most of these options—particularly the air conditioning, power steering, XAS tires, tinted glass and Skai upholstery. These items are more-or-less normal for a car of this type, and a basic Mercedes 250 sedan costs over \$6500. So, though the Bavaria's price is quite in line, it should not be considered a \$5000 car. \$6000 would be more like it.

Now to the car. It is a high-quality, straightforward compact sedan with room for four or five people, a large trunk, good acceleration, high top speed, quietness of operation, good handling and topnotch brakes. The sort of car one buys if one wants good, fast transportation for full-size people without having to manage a barge in traffic.

The inline 6-cyl engine is the best of its type in the world. A typical BMW camshaft-chain whirr gives this unit an almost musical quality, blending with a mellow but interesting exhaust note; mechanical noise is at a minimum and seems to have been reduced from earlier 2800s. For the Bavaria, a 3.64:1 final drive is used, versus the 3.45:1 of 2800s, and this makes a noticeable contribution to acceleration but leaves high-speed cruising reasonably quiet if slightly busy. The gearing also means that top speed is limited by the engine redline rather than power available, so those given to wide-open cruising had best keep an eye on the tachometer. And those who drive in speed-limited places—alas, most of us—had best keep an eye on the speedometer (which, in line with usual BMW practice, is substantially optimistic), for this is a car that just wants to go fast. At 70 mph it seems to be merely warming up, getting ready for serious work!

Lean carburetion to meet U.S. emission regulations means an occasional stumble when accelerating, and when starting from cold there are various misbehaviors such as too-high idling speed and severe stumbling. All this is too typical of cars meeting 1971 emission regulations with carburetors rather than fuel injection.

Once warmed up, though, the engine generally behaves itself and smooth driving is reasonably easy and very rewarding. The gearbox is really marvelous, with quiet gears and a shift linkage that must be the envy of every carmaker in the world. One persistent BMW quirk remains: a noisy clutch throwout bearing.

One sits high in the Bavaria, looking out through a big windshield and tall glass all around. It really doesn't seem very small, but it's plenty maneuverable and in contrast to a domestic sedan of equal carrying capacity it is small at 185 in. long and 69 in. wide. The ZF power steering is good, better than on earlier 2500-2800s, giving a feel reasonably close to that of unassisted steering. But the steering wheel is too big and too high.

In on-the-road handling the Bavaria is delightful, though with 175-14 tires it doesn't have bundles of cornering power; the Michelin XAS tires, with their asymmetrical tread, are great in the rain but unless inflated very hard they squeal in brisk driving. There's lots of suspension travel and the springs and shocks are supple, so one can drive fast on most any kind of road surface. Something is slightly off, however, in the relation of front-to-rear spring or shock calibrations, because there's a distinct bobbing motion to the ride over gently undulating surfaces.

The brakes are superb, hauling the car down from any speed in a reasonable distance and with fine directional control; they also come through our standard fade test with no fade, as you'd expect from 4-wheel discs. They are vacuum boosted and some staff members felt they were a bit too light; in any case there is, as with the steering, a good relationship between driver effort and what happens at the tires.

We haven't seen a "standard" Bavaria interior and prob-

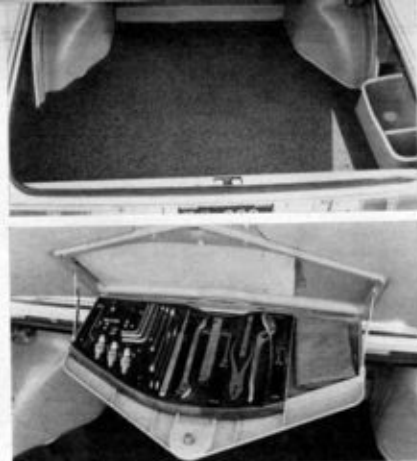
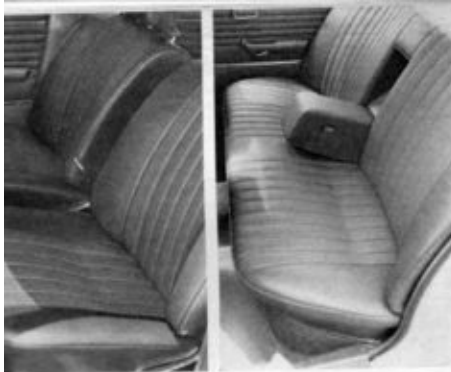
COMPARISON DATA

	BMW Bavaria	Mercedes 250	Pontiac 2000S
List price, incl. prep	\$5187	\$6513	\$5498
Curb weight, lb	3170	3150	3195
0-60 mph, sec	9.3	13.6	11.9
Standing ¼-mi, sec	16.8	19.0	17.7
Speed at end	82	72	75
Stopping distance from 80 mph, ft	308	300	329
Fade in 6 stops from 60 mph, %	nil	nil	52
Cornering capability, g	0.726	n.a.	n.a.
Fuel economy, mpg	18.0	16.0	17.5

ably never will. The optional one, upholstered in Skai (which is BMW's particular type of vinyl), is about equal to that of the 2002 in plushness. It's by no means stark, though there's nothing terribly rich about it. The individual front seats are firm in the typical German manner and likely to be very comfortable over the long haul; they offer little side support, so one must rely on the 3-point belts for that. These have been improved; they now hook onto a fixed bracket between the seats so that there are no longer separate inboard belts to mess with. But the anchorage point for the shoulder part is too high, causing the belt to ride too near the necks of most front-seat occupants. The seatbacks adjust over a fairly wide range; however, with that large steering wheel we

GORDON CHITTENDEN PHOTOS





BAVARIA

kept wishing for a steering column also adjustable for rake.

That's the front seat. What about the rear? In a word, it's usable. Designed primarily for two people, it has a central armrest that folds up to make way for a third. For an average male there's plenty of headroom and legroom; an over-six-footer will be somewhat cramped there. There's plenty of luggage space for an extended trip for four people; nearly 15 cu ft in a deep, well finished trunk. Our car had the optional toolkit which drops down from the trunklid to reveal an impressive collection of tools, spare bulbs and fuses and even three spare sparkplugs. Perhaps you'll never need much of this stuff, but it's sure a great conversation piece when you're intimidating your Cadillac-owning neighbors with the BMW's workmanship.

Speaking of workmanship, the test car had it in abundance: beautiful paint (the metallic silver paint that costs extra and is difficult to match), well-fitted upholstery, neat edges, a nicely finished underhood with enough instruction plaques to constitute a second owner's manual, and a thoroughly rattle- and squeak-free body.

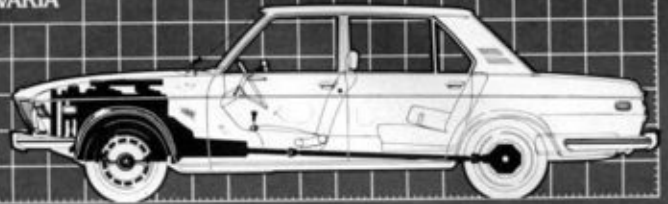
And as a peripheral point, the Bavaria's taillight assemblies are noteworthy. They are large and are divided into distinct segments for their various functions: normal running lights, directionals, stoplights and backups. The directionals are amber, as on many imported cars lately, and benefit from that color as well as from being separate segments. When we see taillights that simply go brighter and dimmer as the directionals flash or which extinguish the stoplights on one side it becomes all too obvious how superior the BMW's arrangement is.

We could wax ecstatic about the Bavaria. It is only fair to mention that we have had considerable feedback from owners who have had mechanical problems with early 2500s and 2800s, but BMW has a good record of correcting faults once discovered. Assuming that most of the early problems have been solved now (only an R&T Owner Survey can confirm this to us for sure) and giving the Bavaria due credit for its almost incredibly good driving characteristics, we can conclude by saying that it is one of the world's best buys in luxury sedans.





ROAD TEST BMW BAVARIA

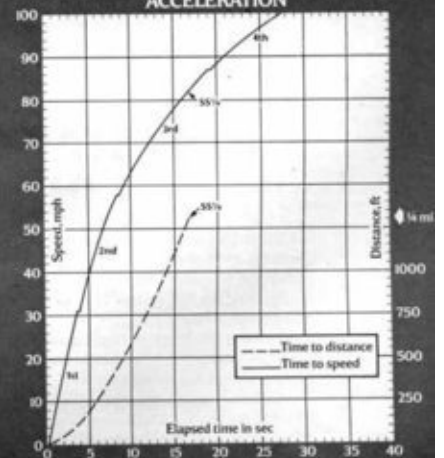


PRICE List price, east coast\$4987 List price, west coast\$5087 Price as tested, west coast\$6386 Price as tested includes Michelin XAS tires (\$50), Skai upholstery (\$65), metallic paint (\$100), tool kit (\$42), power steering (\$225), air conditioning (\$484), sunroof (\$175), tinted glass (\$56), dealer prep (\$180)	DRIVE TRAIN Transmission 4-speed manual Gear ratios: 4th (1.00) 3.64:1 2nd (1.36) 5.02:1 2nd (2.12) 7.72:1 1st (3.85) 14.01:1 Final drive ratio 3.64:1	ACCOMMODATION Seating capacity, persons 5 Seat width, front/rear 2 x 23/55 Head room, front/rear 38.0/37.0 Seat back adjustment, degrees 85 INSTRUMENTATION Instruments: 140-mph speedo, 99,999 odo, 999.9 trip odo, 8000-rpm tach, coolant temp, fuel level, clock Warning lights: oil pressure, generator, fuel level, high beam, directionals, hazard flasher	MAINTENANCE Service intervals, mi: Oil change 4000 Filter change 4000 Chassis lube none Minor tuneup 4000 Major tuneup 8000 Warranty, mo./mi 12/12,500
IMPORTER Hoffman Motors Corp. 375 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022	CHASSIS & BODY Layout front engine/rear drive Body/frame unit steel Brake type: 10.7-in disc front & rear, vacuum assisted Sweep area, sq in 493 Wheels steel disc, 14 x 6J Tires Michelin XAS 175HR-14 Steering type worm & roller, power assisted Overall ratio 18.9:1 Turns, lock-to-lock 4.0 Turning circle, ft 35.0 Front suspension: MacPherson struts, lower A-arms, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar Rear suspension: semi-trailing arms, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar	GENERAL Curb weight, lb 3170 Test weight 3480 Weight distribution (with driver), front/rear, % 56/44 Wheelbase, in 106.0 Track, front/rear 56.9/57.6 Overall length 185.0 Width 68.9 Height 56.1 Ground clearance 5.5 Overhang, front/rear 34.7/44.3 Usable trunk space, cu ft 14.6 Fuel tank capacity, U.S. gal 19.8	CALCULATED DATA Lb./bhp (test weight) 18.1 Mph/1000 rpm (4th gear) 19.4 Engine revs./mi (60 mph) 3080 Piston travel, ft./mi 1620 R & T steering index 1.40 Brake sweep area sq in/ton 284
ENGINE Type 6-cyl inline 6 Bore x stroke, mm 86.0 x 80.0 Equivalent in 3.39 x 3.15 Displacement, cc/cu in 2788/170 Compression ratio 9.0:1 Bhp @ rpm 192 @ 6000 Equivalent mph 118 Torque @ rpm, lb.-ft. 200 @ 3700 Equivalent mph 73 Carburetor: two Solex 35/40 (NAT) Type fuel required: premium, 99-oct Emission control engine mods	RELIABILITY From R&T Owner Surveys the average number of trouble areas for all models surveyed is 11. As owners of earlier models BMW 1600 & 2002 reported 7 trouble areas, we expect the reliability of the BMW Bavaria to be better than average.		

ROAD TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION Time to distance, sec: 0-100 ft 3.0 0-250 ft 5.8 0-500 ft 9.1 0-750 ft 11.8 0-1000 ft 14.2 0-1320 ft (¼ mi) 16.8 Speed at end of ¼ mi, mph 82 Time to speed, sec: 0-30 mph 3.6 0-40 mph 5.1 0-50 mph 6.7 0-60 mph 8.3 0-70 mph 12.3 0-80 mph 16.0 0-100 mph 27.6 Passing exposure time, sec: To pass car going 50 mph 5.5	BRAKES Panic stop from 80 mph: Max. deceleration rate, % g 84 Stopping distance, ft 308 Control good Pedal effort for 50%-g stop, lb. 20 Fade test: percent increase in pedal effort to maintain 50%-g deceleration rate in 5 stops from 60 mph nil Parking: Held 30% grade? yes Overall brake rating very good	HANDLING Speed on 100-ft radius, mph 33.0 Lateral acceleration, g 0.726	SPEEDOMETER ERROR 30 mph indicated is actually 29.0 40 mph 39.0 50 mph 48.0 60 mph 57.0 70 mph 66.0 80 mph 76.0 100 mph 94.0 Odometer, 10.0 mi 10.0
FUEL CONSUMPTION Normal driving, mpg 18.0 Cruising range, mi 355			
SPEEDS IN GEARS 4th gear (5200 rpm) 122 3rd (5200) 87 2nd (5200) 58 1st (5200) 31			

ACCELERATION



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