

ILLUSTRATION BY WERNER BÜHRER

After the New Wears Off BMW 2800CS

24,000 miles of delightful—and expensive—motoring

RON WAKEFIELD

THIS IS MY third long-term report on a personal car since I came to R&T, and those who remember my other two—on a 1964 Corvette and a Mercedes 250SL—may begin to wonder if I'm capable of anything but praise for the cars of my personal choice. Well, actually there's little reason I should wind up with a bad car, having as I do the opportunity to try just about every car available and regularly getting feedback from the owners of them.

In the case of the 2800CS I wanted one as soon as I'd driven our road-test car (February 1970 R&T) 10 miles. Here was a car that combined most of the qualities I seek in my own conveyance, which has to be an all-around sort of car: high performance and good handling, quietness and luxury, quality construction and good style. Of course, though, any car with all these attributes isn't going to be cheap, and the CS is not. In comparison to BMW's 6-cylinder sedan series, already fairly expensive, the CS is even more so because its body is more-or-less custom built in very small quantities by the Karmann factory.

A brief review of the model's technicalities is in order. The CS (Coupe Sport) is an amalgam of the earlier 4-cyl 2000CS, using its body shell from the windshield back, and the 6-cyl sedan's powertrain and front suspension. A clever restyling job made the 2800CS far more attractive than the 2000CS and its interior was made much fancier. The engine is a 2788-cc sin-

gle-overhead-cam inline unit with two Solex carburetors, producing 170 bhp @ 6000 rpm and driving through a manual 4-speed or automatic 3-speed transmission to independently sprung rear wheels. Our 1970 test car did 0-60 in 9.3 sec and 126 mph top speed. One curious technical detail on the coupe is that it had drum brakes at the rear—a rather incredible thing in view of its price and traceable to its 2000CS heritage. This has been corrected in the present coupe, which also has a 3-liter engine and is called 3.0 CS but is otherwise the same car.

I was willing to overlook the brake deficiency because I like the car so much otherwise and ordered one in October 1970. Shortly after I placed the order, the 1969 2800 sedan the Publisher had bought began giving plenty of trouble—engine, brake and transmission problems—and I had second thoughts. But I decided not to back out and took delivery of the coupe in December. The basic price, now higher because of currency juggling, was \$8178; air conditioning, AM/FM radio, metallic paint, leather upholstery and a couple of minor options brought the total to \$9391 before sales tax.

Despite getting the car directly from the importer, Hoffman Motors, I didn't get a perfectly prepared car. Karmann hadn't done a good job of fitting the left door, there was a rain leak into the glove box, and the engine stumbled badly on acceleration—the latter a common problem with emission-controlled engines. There's a free initial service at 600 miles, so I returned ➡

BMW 2800CS

it to Hoffman's for this and correction of the problems. It took considerable work for them to get the door straight. They didn't fix the rain leak (it's still there but there's been so little rain on the car I hardly ever think of it), and they were able to reduce the stumbling but not cure it. The accelerator pumps, I was told, had leather seals; these were being replaced with Neoprene ones in later cars and they would install them on my car as soon as they were available. This was done later and reduced the stumble to an acceptable level without completely solving it.

In the first 1000 miles or so I detected a subtle but strange characteristic: on acceleration the car steered slightly to the right, on deceleration more slightly to the left. Hoffman's service engineer explained that this was common with the Continental tires my car had (textile-belt radials, size D70-14) and that they would replace these with the alternate tire, the Michelin XAS 175-14. What I really wanted was the fat Michelin XVR 195/70-14 gumball, but this wasn't available in the U.S. yet and I let them install the tiny 175s with the promise I'd get the big tires later. These gave the car a much better ride and, I must admit, no loss in cornering power.

XVRs didn't become available, and as things developed the car became something of a tire test car. I looked around for a set of wide (70-series) radials and settled on the B.F. Goodrich Lifesaver in E70-14 size. BFG sent me a set to try and I installed them. These are very wide—probably as wide as the car will take without clearance problems. Naturally they increased the car's cornering power on dry roads and, with larger rolling radius, corrected the highly optimistic speedometer. Rain was something else—they were really slippery. The BFGs stayed on the car for about 10,000 miles and were only very lightly worn when removed—long wear, not traction, is their forte.

There was no BMW dealer near me, so for the 4000-mile service I took the coupe to my favorite independent shop, a Mercedes place where I'd had the 250SL serviced. This minor service routine costs about \$14-\$16. The major one, done every 8000 miles, costs something like \$65-\$70.

By the time for the 8000-mi service a BMW dealer, Roy Carver, had opened and I took the car there for its routine service as well as correction of two problems that had developed. One was that the power steering was no longer helping much on right turns, another that the brakes were pulling to the left. This episode turned out to be the most unpleasant in the car's life so far. Perhaps partly because the BMW business was new to Carver's dealership (it handled Rolls-Royce also!), the power steering repair was botched. A new steering gear was installed and in putting everything back together the mechanic got the steering wheel on crooked. As for the brake pulling, the service manager had the nerve to tell me he couldn't detect this—which could only mean he didn't try—and it was not fixed at all. And finally, there was a new little dent in the hood! Considering the dealership hopeless, I took advantage of my connections and the Hoffman people kindly took the car in for rework. The brake trouble was in the rear drums, wouldn't you know it!

Back to the independent shop, therefore, for all service work. BMW's service routine calls for a full tuneup every 8000 miles, and the engine stays beautifully in tune for that mileage—providing it is driven hard. If not, the plugs get dirty and a typical high-speed miss develops. Since the first tuneup, at which NGK B7ES plugs were installed, I've experimented with letting them go longer than 8000. They'll do it but not without some deterioration at the high end of the rev range. Otherwise, the engine is marvelously untemperamental for one developing one net horsepower from each cubic inch.

A trip to Northern California at about the 10,000-mi mark brought out one of the car's remarkable characteristics even more than my daily suburban driving did: its fuel economy.

A 3000-lb car that will get 19 mpg under my heavy foot is remarkable any way you look at it—and on this gentle trip, run mostly at speeds of 70-75 mph, the car turned in a corrected 23.5 mpg!

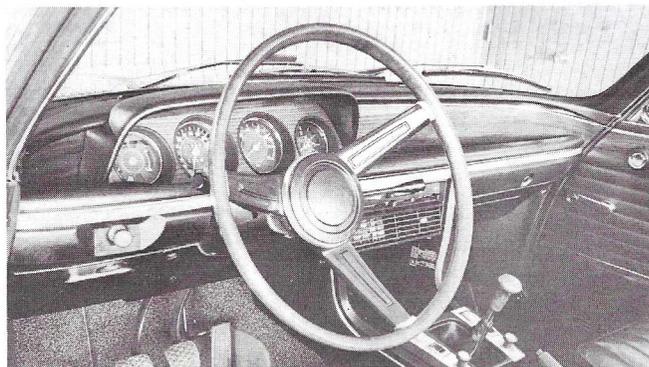
This trip also revealed a shortcoming that didn't surprise me: wholly inadequate air conditioning. At ambient temperatures above 90 the Behr system, with its old-fashioned and rough reciprocating compressor, just couldn't keep the greenhouse-like passenger compartment comfortably cool.

Sometime during the next 5000 miles two problems became evident. The 2nd-gear synchronizer, generally a weak point with the otherwise excellent ZF gearbox, had deteriorated and I now couldn't make a quick shift from 1st to 2nd at high speed without graunching. The other was a sticky thermostat, evidenced by the coolant temperature's overshooting before settling to normal operating level. Out of warranty, I wasn't eager to have the gearbox fixed, but I had the 'stat replaced at the 16,000-mi service. It cost \$8.15!

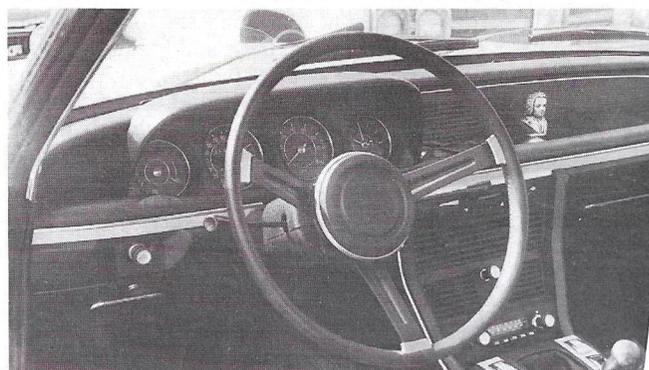
From 16,000 miles on it's been mostly uneventful with the CS. There had been some shipping damage on the car before I got it, and the paint on the lower right side where the repairs were made had deteriorated badly. Since the car was less than a year old, Hoffman offered to have this repaired at the body shop where the work had been done originally. This was done satisfactorily, at least as far as I can tell now. Shortly thereafter, as luck would have it, a careless soul put a scrape on the left rear quarter and an attempt to paint only the damaged area didn't work. That silver metallic paint just can't be matched with a repaint, and therefore the whole left side got repainted below the chrome strip just as the right side had been. I think the silver is a great color for this car, but ordering it is a calculated risk.

Back to tires. The Continental people had heard of my trouble with the original tires. They called and offered me a set of their latest ones to test, essentially the same as the originals but renamed 195/70-14, as well as assuring me the BMW man's opinion of them was dead wrong. The new Conti TTs arrived and I installed them.

What do you know! All the old problems back again. Pull to the right under power, to the left on deceleration. Ferocious



Smaller padded-rim wheel from 2002 tii, below, gave better driving position and easier grip.



road rumble at 25-45 mph. I was flabbergasted. Conversation with the Continental man, who suggested rolling-radius irregularity. So I swapped the two rear tires side-to-side. And, completely mysteriously, the pulling symptoms disappeared. So that's cleared up, and as last month's tire test showed, these tires with their super-aggressive tread are very good in the rain. But the rumble—which sounds something like the noise truck or snow tires make—is too much and I'll get these tires off the car as soon as I can locate some XVRs.

The cost of one set of tires and tubes is included in the table even though I haven't actually bought any tires, because I'm sure either the Contis or the Michelins would have worn out in my driving 24,000 miles. The figures given are for the Conti 195/70 tires.

I've added a pair of Lucas Square 8 halogen foglamps, which do a nice job in the frequent coastal fog of California. And I got a dealer to swap me the padded-rim steering wheel of a 2002tii for the monstrous oversize simulated-wood wheel that came on the car. The new wheel is about 2 in. smaller in diameter and makes long-distance driving noticeably more comfortable.

That's about the story on this 2800CS. Obviously a 24,000-mi test isn't going to wear out a good car, but it gives one a good idea how well the car was put together and what sort of life expectancy it has. At the 24,000 mark there were the following observations:

- Compression, all cylinders, 160 psi (same as at 12,000)
- Oil consumption 1 qt/2000 mi
- Slight oil leak from differential
- Leaking left rear shock absorber
- Pinhole in rear muffler

Everything considered, the car is in very good shape. The 2nd-gear synchro of course is still weak. I'd say the car doesn't have the bank-vault durability of my Mercedes, but it shows

every sign of being decently durable. And the enjoyment of driving it, of listening to its beautiful engine sound, of sitting in the supremely comfortable leather seats (and smelling them) fully justify to me a cost per mile that's nearly 10¢ more than what the average American spends to run his domestic barge.

BMW 2800CS

Overall Costs & Cost per Mile for 24,000 Miles

Delivered price, incl. dealer prep & sales tax	\$9860
Gasoline (premium, average of 19.0 mpg)	467
Routine maintenance, mostly by the book (see text)	220
Repairs and replacements (includes engine thermostat, one tire repair, four new tires and tubes)	279
License fee, California, one-and-one-half years	189
Insurance (\$15,000-\$30,000/\$10,000 liability, medical, comprehensive, \$100 deductible collision, uninsured motorist)	368
Accessories and installation, modifications	86
Total expenditure, 24,000 miles	\$11,469
Resale value at end of period (based on Kelley Blue Book), wholesale	6050
Cost of driving 24,000 miles	\$5419
Overall cost per mile for 24,000 miles	22.6¢

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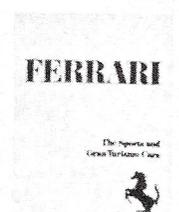
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