

# BMW 540i

Love and Happiness: This Bimmer's Baaad



By Blair S. Walker

We've amassed 11,118 miles on our BMW 540i six-speed manual sedan, a vehicle I've taken to calling Marion Jones. That's because our anthracite metallic gray Bimmer is regal, charming, and generates eye-popping performance for a car its size.

The rear tires are set in motion by a 282-horsepower, 4.4-liter V8, which delivers power in a very linear fashion and is surprisingly quiet while sending the tachometer and speedometer needles streaking into orbit.

The double-overhead cam, 32-valve power plant also pumps out a massive 324 lb-ft of torque, meaning you only have to goose the throttle if you don't feel like downshifting. This is good for dealing with the stop-and-go rush hour madness of Washington, D.C., where we've been putting the 540i through its paces. Torque and horsepower are wonderful, but the 540i's sport-tuned suspension may be the car's most impres-

sive feature. The handling is spot-on perfect, there's no understeer (that's a sense that the car wants to go straight instead of turn) or oversteer (that's when the back end feels like it's going to snap around).

The vehicle handles in such a neutral, confidence-inspiring manner that during a spirited romp you can easily keep up with smaller sport coupes.

Or leave them in the dust, if you're so inclined.

That component of the Bimmer's personality disappears the moment you ease up on the throttle, allowing you to be a model of rectitude as you sedately drive the family home from church.

The Bimmer's tan leather interior is exquisite, although more leg room for rear passengers would be welcome. The 540i's trunk swallows plenty of luggage as long as you stack it carefully.

If any knuckle rapping is called for, it would be with BMW's refusal to put seat warmers in a car that cost almost \$60,000; that's the price of a comfortable house in a lot of places.

I have a Volkswagen Jetta that possesses bun warmers, in addition to doors that lock automatically, another feature our BMW lacks.

But whereas the lovable Jetta is mild-mannered all the time, the Bimmer can be placid or as nasty as it wants to be.

Trust me -- the smooth-shifting 540i can throw down with the best of 'em.