

term Review

BMW 540i

No more Bimmer? Bummer!

By Brian Armstead

The BMW 540i served us well during the past year. Okay, enough with the standard long-term mumbo jumbo. BMW, please don't take the 540i away. There is very little not to like about the 540i. But for my money, all conversations begin and end under the hood. There you will find 4.4-liters of sweet V8 muscle.

If you don't believe the hype, visit your local BMW dealer and pop the hood on a 540i. The presentation is most impressive. The engine sports valve covers with the BMW logo and a massive,



very sophisticated intake/fuel injection cover that makes it look much larger than it really is.

Put your foot heavy on the throttle and the engine instantly lets you know that this "looker" is a serious performer. Drive a 540i and you will never want to drive another six-cylinder car again.

One complaint is the lack of full dash instrumentation. Aside from fuel, water temperature, speedometer and tachometer gauges, there is a silly miles per gallon indicator. It's supposed to

make you more fuel-efficient as you drive. Trust me, if you buy this car, you won't care about miles per gallon.

Driving the 540i is about smiles per mile. BMW would be wise to incorporate oil pressure and voltmeter gauges into the instrumentation.

Another concern is the very small glove box with a lock that has very sharp edges. I once reached into the small opening to pull out the owner's manual, and the lock mechanism took a nice chunk of skin from my ring finger.

Quibbles aside, we'll miss this Bavarian beast's myriad abilities.

Specs at a glance

Base Price:	\$53,900
Price as Tested:	\$57,045
Engine:	32-valve, 282-horsepower V8
Transmission:	6-speed manual
Acceleration:	0-60 mph in 5.8 seconds
EPA mileage:	15 mph city, 23-mpg highway
Miles to date:	12,804

Subaru Outback

She Ain't Pretty, But She Can Work It

By Blair S. Walker

For the life of me, I have a hard time imagining why anyone south of the Mason-Dixon line would get worked up over our 2001 Subaru Outback Limited long-term test vehicle.

The Subaru seems designed solely for fighting Ol' Man Winter, for devouring snowy roads that send motorists into ditches, fumbling for their cell phones. Standard equipment like windshield wiper de-icers, heated side mirrors and a heavy-duty raised suspension seem a little incongruous in, say, Miami Beach.

But given the proliferation of Sport-Utility Vehicles in states where it never snows, Subaru is betting some SUV-weary drivers are ready for all-wheel-drive without a gas-guzzling, barge-like body attached to it.

Like most other Subaru's, our \$26,490 Outback Limited has a face only its designer could love. It sits fairly high off the ground, befitting a vehi-



cle with 7.3 inches of ground clearance. The resulting high center of gravity makes the Outback Limited feel somewhat top heavy during quick maneuvers.

A two-tone paint job - maroon on top, beige on the bottom - typifies Subaru's quirky approach to automotive styling. Mammoth fog lamps nestled in the front bumper appear larger than the headlights on some vehicles.

All of this is irrelevant when it's cold and nasty outside. During one Maryland snowstorm, I sought out an unplowed parking lot covered with five inches of white stuff. The 165-horsepower Subaru cavorted about as

though dealing with a mere dusting. Very impressive.

The interior gets high marks for comfort and there's plenty of legroom for two rear passengers. Interior controls emphasize ease of operation, and the simple dash layout is anchored by a 120-mph speedometer and a tach redlining at 6,200 rpm.

When you see a Subaru on the road, generally a white driver is at the wheel. If more brothers and sisters looked into these ungainly looking vehicles, they'd be pleasantly surprised to discover technical sophistication, standard features and safety touches typically found in cars costing a lot more than \$26,490.

The Joneses, however, are unlikely to be impressed.

Specs at a glance

Base Price:	\$25,995
Price as Tested:	\$26,490
Engine:	2.5-liter, 165-horsepower 4-cyl
Transmission:	4-speed, automatic
Acceleration:	0-60 mph in 9.8 seconds
EPA mileage:	22 mph city, 27-mpg highway
Miles to date:	4,817