

Review: BMW 335d is sweet, and diesel suits the 3 Series

LOS ANGELES — Two things are wrong with the 2009 BMW 335d diesel sedan. Its \$45,000 base price ensures most of America will be denied. And its tight back seat will keep those who acquire the diesel from sharing it with many people at a time.

Those are bad things because the 335d rages in the mind as among the sweetest machines on four wheels. Not *despite* its diesel engine, but largely *because* of it.

PHOTOS: [More views of the BMW 335d](#)

Need a truck or family bus? Perhaps a vehicle that actually fits the budget? The diesel 3's not on your radar. Even so, you can appreciate the heck out of it from afar.

BMW 3 Series sedans are slick-driving machines, and the diesel improves the breed. You don't get the heavenly, rev-happy smoothness of the in-line six-cylinder gas engines. But you get, instead, no compromise, just delight packaged differently.

For starters, the diesel delivers a staggering 425 pounds-feet of torque, more than Toyota's beefy 5.7-liter truck V-8. Torque is low-speed muscle that shows best in traffic, on hills or when towing.

Horsepower — this 3-liter, in-line, six-cylinder diesel has a credible 265 hp — is the higher-speed punch you use whistling onto the big road from an entrance ramp or passing the cellphone doofus on a two-lane.

There were ample samples of challenges on the test route in this city and its twisty, hilly environs.

Given the diesel's power, the driver is in charge of enough energy to place the car almost anywhere in an instant. Not true, of course. Laws of physics and all that. But you get where you want in a right smart hurry. Once you accommodate the conflicting demands of full-throttle thrills and jail-avoiding prudence, the diesel settles into a happy, symbiotic relationship with your right foot.

Two turbos, no waiting is a key to why the BMW diesel is swell to drive. A little one spins easily to boost power fast at low engine speeds. The larger one phases in at higher speed to keep the power boost coming. Unique to BMW, the company says.

The 335d engine sings a low, muted growl when spurred, near-silence when not. None of the gravel-in-a-tin-can rattle that intrudes on the enjoyment of other car diesels. Outside, though, it's obvious the car's a diesel.

The six-speed automatic transmission shifts with the best of 'em. Crisp and smooth, up or down, heavy foot or light, automatic mode or manual. No manual transmission is available.

There's a pterodactyl in the ointment, however.

A chief reason to buy a diesel is fuel economy. While the 335d is good for roughly 30% better mileage than the gasoline 3 Series, diesel fuel right now costs an average 34% more than the premium gasoline BMW specifies for its non-diesels. As for availability, BMW says that in addition to truck stops, 43% of gas stations sell diesel.

The diesel car is some \$2,800 more than the most-similar gasoline model (though BMW says the fuel economy could get you a \$900 tax rebate).

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Other BMW fortes in the diesel car:

- Steering's nicely weighted, neither twitchy nor gratuitously stiff.
- Brakes are firm and respond in proportion to the driver's demands.
- Seats are firm but not hard and well-bolstered for keeping you in place.
- Suspension's supple yet taut. Won't bang you around over potholes, manages fine in fast curves.

In sum, the driving delight isn't restricted to the engine's performance. But neither are the 3's baked-in aggravations exorcised by it. The 3 is a small car with a low, sleek roofline, and that can make it hard to enter and exit. The back seat's so tight for toes as to be nearly unusable if the front seats are pushed back.

Controls, routed through an electronic twist-and-jiggle knob on the console, are still too cumbersome. Some, such as climate control, can be operated directly via dashboard knobs, without going through the electronic menu. Thank goodness.

A diesel caveat: To meet super-tough U.S. clean-air laws, today's diesels inject urea into the exhaust stream to turn emissions into nitrogen and water. The dealer refills the 5.8-gallon urea tank every time the car comes in for an oil change. It's free under BMW's no-cost service that lasts as long as the warranty. Unclear what the stuff will cost when the owner must pay.

The car warns you 1,000 miles before the urea tank is empty. Once empty, to comply with the law, the engine will keep running but won't restart.

Reason to celebrate the 335d has nothing to do with clean air or fuel economy, though. The car is powerful proof that a diesel, done well, can be the zenith of driving, not the nadir that some folks fear.

2009 BMW 335d

What stands out:

Powerful: Floor the throttle at your own risk.

Smooth: This is a *diesel*? Where's the clatter?

Small: You might not fit.

What: High-power diesel version of BMW's best-selling sedan, a four-door, rear-drive compact.

When: A few in December, full supplies in January.

Where: Diesel engine's made by Steyr in Austria. Car's made by BMW in Regensburg, Germany.

Why? Prove a fuel-efficient diesel also is sporty enough for go-fast BMW customers.

How much? Starts at \$44,725 including \$825 shipping. BMW says that's about \$2,800 more than the most-similar gasoline model.

A diesel version of the X5 SUV, built in South Carolina using the same engine as the 335d, goes on sale about the same time starting at \$52,025, is \$4,100 more than the base six-cylinder gasoline X5 and \$4,600 less than the high-end gas V-8 X5. BMW says there's not a gasoline X5 directly comparable to the diesel.

How many? As many as buyers want. BMW says there are no supply constraints.

How powerful? 3-liter, in-line, six-cylinder diesel is rated 265 horsepower at 4,200 rpm, 425 pounds-feet of torque at 1,750 rpm. Six-speed automatic with manual-shift mode funnels power to the rear wheels. No all-wheel-drive diesel model is available. No manual transmission.

How big? Slightly longer, wider than a Honda Civic. 335d is 178.8 inches long, 71.5 in. wide, 55.9 in. tall, on a 108.7-inch wheelbase. Weighs 3,825 lbs., carries up to 1,058 lbs. of people, cargo, accessories.

Trunk is 12 cubic feet.

Turning circle diameter: 36.1 feet.

How fancy? Equipped similarly to gasoline models, including front, side and head-curtain air bags, anti-lock brakes, electronic stability control. Details at bmw.com.

How thirsty? BMW forecasts a government rating of 23 miles per gallon in town, 36 on the highway. Regular-production test car's trip computer showed 30.1 mpg in fast motoring, mainly on hilly, rural two-lane roads.

Ultra-low-sulfur diesel is specified. Tanks holds 16.1 gallons.

Overall: A honey.