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BMW, Mercedes Considering Four-Cylinders for U.S.

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AvatarPosted Yesterday 12:00 PM by [Joshua Duval](#)Category: [News](#), [BMW](#)

As President Obama's administration continues to make stricter fuel economy standards a priority, Germany's top luxury automakers - which traditionally rely on six-cylinder engines in their base model vehicles - are considering four-cylinder engines for the U.S. to meet those standards.

BMW last offered a four-cylinder engine for U.S. consumers in its 318ti hatchback in 1999, which was nixed due to poor sales. But as stricter fuel economy standards approach, BMW North America CEO Jim O'Donnell says a direct-injected, turbocharged four-cylinder could be on its way.


"The plans will be firmed up when we have definite news from Washington on what the fuel standards are going to be," he said. According to O'Donnell, the engine could be used in the 1-series, the 3-series, and the X1 and X3 crossovers. BMW is designing the new four-cylinder to have as much power as its in-line six-cylinder engines, with better fuel economy and lower emissions.

O'Donnell is wary that consumers may not be willing to pay more for the engine, however. The four-cylinder will cost more for BMW to build, extra cost that will have to be passed down to consumers.

Mercedes-Benz is in the process of deciding whether it should bring the four-cylinder diesel from the E250 Bluetec concept it displayed at the New York auto show earlier this month to the U.S. The 2.2-liter diesel in the concept generates 204 horsepower and returns fuel economy of almost 40 miles per gallon on the highway.

Mercedes-Benz USA's CEO, Ernst Lieb, says that although the engine may not work in the E-class for the U.S. market, it would be well-suited for the C-class sedan and GLK crossover. He said the engine could be used in both of those vehicles' current generations.

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