

In Munich, they have—how should I put this?—they have *rats*. Or at least the BMW press garage has rats. Or at least it has *something*, perhaps ferrets or feral monkeys; and whatever these creatures are, like malevolent pigeons they are gleefully intent on leaving certain evidence of their passage. So when we journey to the press garage to pick up a beautiful sapphire-black two-liter Z4 roadster for a week of analysis, the first thing we notice is a set of tiny footprints on the hood, and the second thing we notice is a not-so-tiny pile of... of... well, a mound of whatever is produced by whatever it is that produces it. And evidently this creature, whatever it might be, has been thriving on a diet of

cement, for although we approach its leavings gingerly with bottled water and paper towels—eeeeew!—it soon becomes clear that the only way we're ever going to chip all of this excrescence from the paint is by means of a chisel. Which will be hard to explain when we bring the car back.

Is this a great way to start a relationship, or what?

And *relationship* is never too strong a word for us in the BMW brigades. But long before most of us signed on as propellerheads, there were other car cultists who bonded with their cars. Maybe it was the postwar age, as the Baby Boomers grew to the age of delinquency and decided they were all James Dean; Henry Gregor

Felsen's *Hot Rod* no doubt fueled their passions, just as a youthful would-be sports-car cult fell under the sway of Don Stanford's *The Red Car*. That's the trouble with literature; teach somebody to read, and pretty soon he's dreaming of new worlds, exploring new concepts like *freedom* and *internal combustion* and *decreasing-radius turn*.

So bonding with our cars is hardly a new phenomenon. Back in the dawn of the postwar sports-car era, those of us attracted to the spindly products adored by that cult were a masochistic lot. We endured British craftsmanship and quaint engineering; the notion of *cabin heat* was a chimera, the heater controls a placebo. The concept of comfort, let alone luxury, was not for our crowd; our

parents were looking for comfort. We were after something else, something intangible, some existential essence we couldn't explain, something having to do with what happened to us when we drove a particular car, what we did together, what we became.

Mind you, none of this had anything to do with speed *per se*. Oh, sure, our hot-rod pals were on a different tack, intent on anything that lowered the time it took to cross 1,320 feet of smooth asphalt. They were worshippers at the V8 throne, while we sports-car junkies

invariably thought in multiples of four; as their world expanded to 265 cubic inches, then 283, then 327, ours was defined in metric terms: 1,500 cubic centimeters, 1,600, 1,800, two liters. And though the passions were similar, the philosophies were not; no sports-car buff in his right mind would ever take his wire-wheeled amigo to a drag strip, because by the time you get to the end of a quarter mile in, say, an MG TD, it's time for dinner.

No. We were masters of the Curvy Road.

That's what we told our hot-rod buddies, at any rate. "Race ya from here to—" we'd say, naming some destination on the far side of a mountain range well supplied with switchbacks and hairpins. "Well, of course

you're fast in a straight *line*," we'd sneer, "but my car is all about *handling*." (Nothing ever came of these challenges, at least among my coterie, though such boasting did something to our brains that made us strive constantly for some sort of Personal Best over one road or another. Thus there is still inscribed in my cranial plaque the details of the time, in the days before the Interstate, when I made it from Reno to San Francisco in three hours and twenty minutes—in a Volkswagen Karmann-Ghia. And once I averaged over eighty for 180 miles in Alaska, but that was only because the heater wasn't working and I was downright desperate.)

BMW blurred the lines, of course, with the development of the sport sedan.



Not So Fast

Like all Z4s, the two-liter roadster is made in America—
but it's not for domestic consumption.

BY SATCH CARLSON
PHOTOGRAPHS BY KELLY KIRKLAND



Into each life, a little—
well, maybe the detailer
can get it off.



The Z4's nav system
makes getting around
cities a simple matter.

Well, they had to do *something*. Their postwar ploy, once they were allowed to build cars again, was loosely based on the notion that somebody out there must still have some money, so they launched the 501 and 502 “Baroque Angels,” followed by a rather nice 503 coupe and convertible—but nobody would ever call these barges sports cars. And the 507, while it may have echoed the wonderful heritage of BMW’s prewar 328 roadsters—sports cars indeed!—was well beyond the means of most enthusiasts.

As for the “people with money” ploy, well, evidently they were throwing it in some other direction. Buying the rights (and the tooling) to make BMW Isettas in 1955 put the company in touch with commoners in need of cheap transportation, and the doors stayed open while sales inched along into the 1960s. Then, after eking through a few years on the sales of the motorcycle-engined Isetta and its successors, the 600 and 700, BMW switched directions—think of a handbrake turn—and redefined the market with the 1500, 1600, and 2002: nondescript little sedans of great utilitarian purpose, but which cornered like turpentine ocelots. And all of a sudden—okay, in ten or twenty years—we

saw BMW tearing down the road of high performance, all the while increasing the luxury and practicality of its offerings. Handling? We got it. Oh, you want some horsepower to go along with that, Mister Hot Rodder? Okay, we’ll put in a call to Motorsport. Hold the line.

As a result, today’s 21st Century BMW junkie yawns at the quaint notion of a mere hundred horsepower per liter—and BMW has analyzed its modern market well. It’s as if they suddenly realized that America is full of hot-rod delinquents entering their second adolescence; this is the land of Bigger Is Better, and if you can supersize me with a V8, arrh arrh *ARRH*, then surely a V10 is just the ticket.

Even when BMW figured out they could return to their sports-car roots in addition to their mainstream production, they didn’t linger long before invoking the hot-rod dictum *When In Doubt, Go Bigger*. The 1.9-liter Z3 roadster was a kiddie car compared to the M roadster, and before long BMW quietly stopped selling a four-cylinder Z3 in America—at the same time they were pulling the plug on the 318ti and any other four-pot thinking in the States. Why? Because those guys from the far Asian side of the globe... those guys with the *cheap*

cars... *they’re* peddling fours. Americans want *performance*; Americans want *pre-stige*; Americans want to buy their spark plugs in half-dozen lots at a minimum.

Which is a shame, really.

Because the truth is, while BMW has developed great thundering wonderful cars to feed the American appetite for power, they have also been developing great cars for the rest of the world, including diesels that don’t rattle and hum—diesels, in fact, in such array that they now range from a tiny, economical four-cylinder to common-rail V8s with bi-turbo sixes in between; and no matter what we Yanks think about diesels (or, rather, what BMW assumes we think), anybody who gets a chance to drive one realizes that this is a whole new plateau, far removed from the 524td that became a cult car the last time BMW brought oil-burners to our shores. To drive one of these cars is to be convinced that BMW has a bright diesel future in the Colonies, and BMW has confirmed that the diesels are coming, probably in 2007.

Not so the two-liter Z4.

It’s probably a sound marketing decision, alas. The problem with BMW’s last four-pot roadster, the 1.9-liter Z3—that is, the marketing problem; the rear suspen-

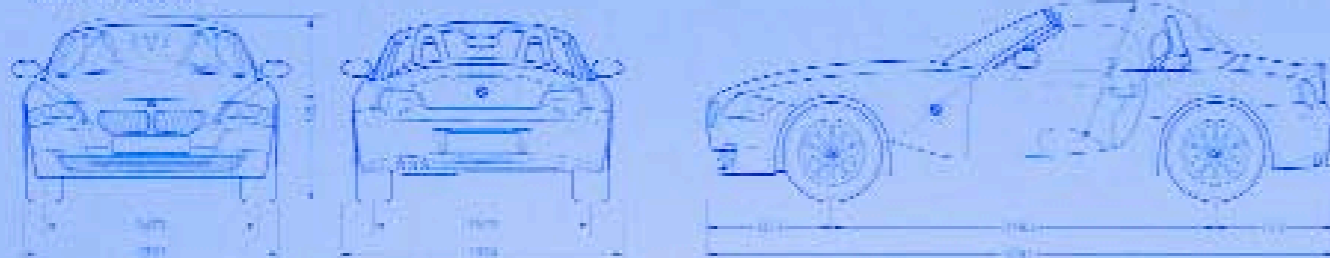
TECHNICAL SPECS



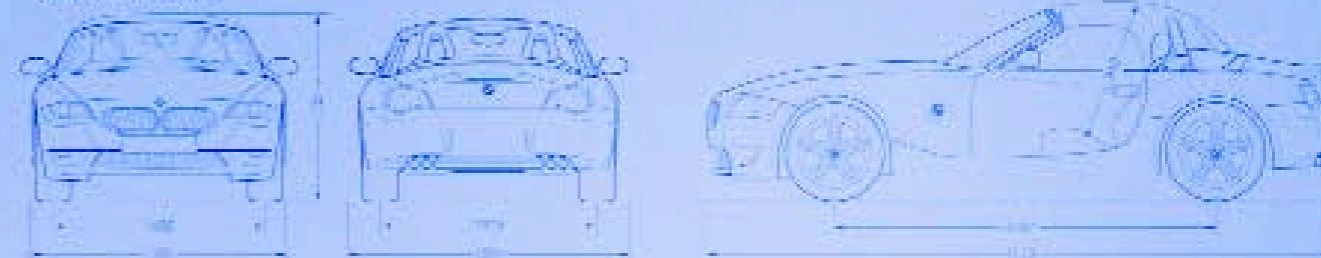
MODEL YEAR: 2006
AREAS OF COMPARISON: BODY,
ENGINE & ELECTRICAL, DRIVELINE,
CHASSIS, PERFORMANCE DATA

Z4 2.0i, 2.5i, 2.5si, 3.0si, and M roadster

BMW Z4 roadster



BMW Z4 M roadster



| Model | Z4 2.0i | Z4 2.5i | Z4 2.5si | Z4 3.0si | Z4 M roadster |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| No. of doors/seats | 2/2 | 2/2 | 2/2 | 2/2 | 2/2 |
| Length/width/height unladen, mm (inches) | 4,091 (161)/1,781 (70)/1,299 (51) | 4,091 (161)/1,781 (70)/1,299 (51) | 4,091 (161)/1,781 (70)/1,299 (51) | 4,091 (161)/1,781 (70)/1,299 (51) | 4,113 (162)/1,781 (70)/1,302 (51) |
| Wheelbase, mm (inches) | 2,495 (98.2) | 2,495 (98.2) | 2,495 (98.2) | 2,495 (98.2) | 2,495 (98.2) |
| Track, front/rear, mm (inches) | 1,473 (57.9)/1,523 (59.9) | 1,473 (57.9)/1,523 (59.9) | 1,473 (57.9)/1,523 (59.9) | 1,473 (57.9)/1,523 (59.9) | 1,486 (58.5)/1,516 (59.7) |
| Turning circle, meters | 9.8 | 9.8 | 9.8 | 9.8 | 10.5 |
| Tank capacity, approx. ltr (U.S. gal) | 55 (14.5) | 55 (14.5) | 55 (14.5) | 55 (14.5) | 55 (14.5) |
| Cooling system, incl heating, liters | 8.0 (8.8) | 7.6 (8.4) | 7.6 (8.4) | 7.6 (8.4) | 10.7 |
| Engine oil, liters | 4.25 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 7.0 |
| Transmission fluid, liters | 1.9 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 1.9 |
| Final drive fluid, liters | 1.2 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| Weight, unladen, kg/pounds ¹ | 1,295/2,855 | 1,345/2,965 (1,375/3,031) | 1,360/2,998 (1,395/3,075) | 1,385/3,053 (1,415/3,119) | 1,485/3,273 |
| Max load to DIN | 300 | 300 | 300 | 300 | 295 |
| Max permissible weight to DIN | 1,520 | 1,570 (1,600) | 1,585 (1,620) | 1,610 (1,640) | 1,705 |
| Max axle load, front/rear | 750/840 | 780/840 | 780/850 | 790/860 | 840/910 |
| Luggage compartment, liters | 240-260 | 240-260 | 240-260 | 240-260 | 200-220 |
| Drag coefficient, cd x A | 0.35 x 1.91 | 0.36 x 1.91 | 0.36 x 1.91 | 0.36 x 1.91 | 0.37 x 1.92 |

Engine

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Config/No. of cyls/valves per cyl | Inline/4/4 | Inline/6/4 | Inline/6/4 | Inline/6/4 | Inline/6/4 |
| Engine management | MEV9 | MSV70 | MSV70 | MSV70 | MSS70 |
| Capacity, cc | 1,995 | 2,497 | 2,497 | 2,996 | 3,246 |
| Bore/stroke, mm | 84.0/90.0 | 82.0/78.8 | 82.0/78.8 | 85.0/88.0 | 87/91 |
| Compression ratio | 10.5:1 | 11.0:1 | 11.0:1 | 10.7:1 | 11.5:1 |
| Fuel grade (RON) | 91-98 | 91-98 ² | 91-98 ² | 91-98 ² | 95-98 |
| Output, kW/U.S. hp | 110/147.5 | 130/174.3 | 160/214.6 | 195/261.5 | 252/337.9 |
| at rpm | 6,200 | 5,800 | 6,500 | 6,600 | 7,900 |
| Torque, Nm/ft-lb | 200/147 | 230/169 | 250/184 | 315/232 | 365/232 |
| at rpm | 3,600 | 3,500-5,000 | 2,750-4,250 | 2,750 | 4,900 |

Electrical System

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Battery output/location (Ah) | 55/trunk | 55/trunk | 55/trunk | 55/trunk | 70/trunk |
| Alternator, A/W | 110/1,540 | 155/2,170 | 155/2,170 | 155/2,170 | 147/2,058 |

Chassis and Suspension

| | Z4 2.0i | Z4 2.5i | Z4 2.5si | Z4 3.0si | Z4 M roadster |
|---------------------------|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Suspension, front | Single-joint spring strut axle with displaced castor; small, positive steering roll radius; compensation of lateral forces; anti-dive | | | | Single-joint spring strut axle with multiple track control arms; fixed-position ball joint on guide joint; thrust plate, twin-sleeve gas pressure spring struts |
| Suspension, rear | Independent, central arm rear axle; separate springs and dampers; anti-squat and anti-dive | | | | Central arm axle with separate springs/dampers, twin-sleeve gas pressure dampers |
| Brakes, front & back | Vented discs | Vented discs | Vented discs | Vented discs | Single-piston swing calipers, compound discs |
| Diameter, front/rear, mm | 286/280 | 286/280 | 300/294 | 325/294 | 345/328 |
| Driving stability systems | ABS, DSC, DTC | ABS, DSC, DTC | ABS, DSC, DTC | ABS, DSC, DTC | ABS, CBC, DSC, DBC, variable M diff. lock |
| Steering | Electrical power steering (EPS) | Electrical power steering (EPS) | Electrical power steering (EPS) | Electrical power steering (EPS) | Rack-and-pinion steering with hydraulic assistance |
| Overall steering ratio | 16:1 | 14.2:1 | 14.2:1 | 14.2:1 | 15.4:1 |
| Transmission | Six-speed manual | Six-speed manual | Six-speed manual | Six-speed manual | Six-speed manual |
| Gear ratios (:1) First | 4.32 | 4.32 (4.17) | 4.32 (4.17) | 4.35 (4.17) | 4.35 |
| Second | 2.46 | 2.46 (2.34) | 2.46 (2.34) | 2.50 (2.34) | 2.50 |
| Third | 1.66 | 1.66 (1.52) | 1.66 (1.52) | 1.66 (1.52) | 1.67 |
| Fourth | 1.23 | 1.23 (1.14) | 1.23 (1.14) | 1.23 (1.14) | 1.23 |
| Fifth | 1.00 | 1.00 (0.87) | 1.00 (0.87) | 1.00 (0.87) | 1.00 |
| Sixth | 0.85 | 0.85 (0.69) | 0.85 (0.69) | 0.85 (0.69) | 0.85 |
| Reverse | 3.94 | 3.93 (3.40) | 3.93 (3.40) | 3.93 (3.40) | 3.93 |
| Final drive ratio (:1) | 3.38 | 3.38 (3.91) | 3.38 (3.73) | 3.23 (3.64) | 3.62 |
| Tires, front | 225/50-R16 | 225/55-R16 | 225/55-R16 | 225/45-R17 | 225/45-ZR18 |
| Tires, rear | 225/50-R16 | 225/55-R16 | 225/55-R16 | 225/45-R17 | 255/40-ZR18 |
| Wheels, front/rear | 7Jx16/7Jx16 | 7Jx16/7Jx16 | 7Jx16/7Jx16 | 8Jx17/8Jx17 | 8Jx18/9Jx18 |

Performance

| | | | | | |
|---|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Power-to-weight ratio, DIN, kg/kW (pounds/hp) | 11.10 (19.35) | 9.8 (17.00); auto 10.0 (17.38) | 8.0 (13.97); auto 8.3 (14.33) | 6.7 (11.67); auto 6.9 (11.92) | 5.60 (9.68) |
| Output per liter, kW/ltr (hp/ltr) | 55.1 (73.8) | 52.1 (69.9) | 64.1 (85.9) | 65.1 (87.3) | 77.6 (104.1) |
| Acceleration, 0-100 kph, sec | 8.2 | 7.1 (7.7) | 6.5 (6.9) | 5.7 (6.0) | 5.0 |
| in 4th gear, 80-120 kph, sec | 8.2 | 7.0 | 6.5 | 5.5 | 5.0 |
| Top speed, kph/mpg | 220/136 | 229/142 (225/139) | 240/147 (238/147) | 250/155 (250/155) ⁴ | 250/155 (250/155) ⁴ |

Figures in parentheses apply to models with automatic transmission. ¹Weight of car in road trim (DIN), plus 75 kg for driver and luggage.

²May be increased under certain conditions. ³Performance and fuel consumption figures relate to RON 98 fuel. ⁴Electronically limited.

sion is probably best left for Internet discussions—was that it was a nice little sports car... competing in a market segment that had other nice little sports cars that performed just as well... at a much friendlier price. Sure, you could ante up for an M roadster—and then ante up for a supercharger—and go hunting Corvettes; moreover the very notion of “sports car,” the nature of consumer expectation in that regard, had come many light years from the '50s. Nowadays—well, today's sports-car buyer wants a car that starts *every time he turns the key!* When it begins to sprinkle, he—or, God help us, she—doesn't want to park by the side of the road and wrestle a contorted assemblage of twisted rods into place and batten down a leaky

fabric hatch. And he doesn't want to actually learn anything about torque curves or power bands, heel-and-toe downshifts, or threshold braking; he just wants to sign the papers, put his right foot down, and go.

So the two-liter Z4 2.0i probably wouldn't sell all that well in today's American market. That's especially ironic, since—like the diesel-powered X5—the not-for-U.S.-consumption Z4 is assembled in Spartanburg, South Carolina. And that doesn't mean it isn't a wonderful little roadster, brimming with all the charm and brio that made us sports-car junkies in the first place; so we were determined to get our hands on one and wring it out—along with spending some time in a couple of diesels that may reach our shores.

Though we had to travel to Germany to drive it, the little roadster was worth the trip. A week in a Z4 two-quart is a time machine to a simpler day, a world of winding roads and Walter Mitty dreams, of splendid destinations and room for two, of summer breezes and instant throttle response—a journey to a golden age of motoring joy.

But the Olden Days were never as golden as this.

For one thing, the rich luxury of the Z4's interior is just plain sinful. Heated leather seats—HEATED SEATS?!—provide marvelous support. The burled wood accents are so perfect they look fake. And I think Z4 owners probably wear out the top mechanisms prematurely just show-



JON VAN WOEDEEN

Cute, Maybe—But Make Mine An M Car

During our trip to Germany for the Frankfurt auto show, the *Roundel* gang got the chance to sample three BMWs that aren't currently available in the States: a three-liter-diesel-powered X5; its baby brother, the three-liter diesel X3; and a Z4 equipped with a two-liter four-banger. With fuel prices at record levels, the first two cars made perfect sense—but why would we want a four-cylinder Z4?

For most of the week I drove the X3, which didn't bother me; I've never really been a roadster kind of guy anyway. And besides, the X3 was surprisingly fast. But then on the last day Satch suggested that I drive the Z4 back to Munich so I could give him my impressions.

I know there is a long list of notable journalists who don't particularly care for the latest styling from BMW, but I find the roadster's looks very pleasing. I don't even mind the little hump on the trunk lid that seems to drive its critics batty. My favorite design feature of the car is its tail lights; my least favorite is the roundel/side marker light on the side of the car.

But inside the cabin, I start to frown; there's almost nothing about the interior that I find appealing. Maybe it's just too modern, or maybe there's too much metal and plastic. Then again, it could be those awful deep-set instrument pods, or the

lack of any real gauges. Whatever it is, I just can't seem to buy into the look. Do you think it's my age?

What *did* get me excited was how much fun the Z4 is to drive! This might be the best-handling car BMW makes, and it really shines on twisty mountain switchbacks like those we had to drive between our hotel and the Autobahn. I was in heaven for the 40 or so miles we drove coming down the mountain; it was even fun having the top down so I could feel the elements.

Unfortunately, getting back to Munich required covering a lot of distance in a short time—and that meant using the Autobahn. That's when the shortcomings of the lit-

tle four-banger really showed up. I was always playing catch-up with the X3; it's amazing how fast that little diesel was! After we'd catch them in traffic, we'd lose them again once things opened up a bit. Even with my foot hard on the floor, the best I could coax out of the Z4 was about 220 kph—not a shabby number, but I would have preferred the Z4 3.0i's bigger six-cylinder.

Of course, my opinion may be colored by the fact that I own an M coupe with the 315-horsepower S54 engine. Give me the keys to the new Z4 M roadster or coupe with that engine in it, and I'll demand a rematch with that X3.—Mark Jon Calabrese

M Roadster With An R—As In Arrh Arrh Arrh

Okay: You're a true American with typical Yankee testosterone poisoning. You not only feel the Need for Speed, you embrace it. You figure a factory motor could always use a few more horsepower, or a few hundred. Your friends all have fast BMWs, and in the spirit of camaraderie, you want to scorch their paint as you go by.

The new Z4 M roadster is definitely the car for you.

Powered by the same S54 straight six found in the E46 M3 (as well as in the final two years of Z3 M roadster/coupe produc-

tions), the Z4 M roadster enjoys the latest and greatest upgrades in engine management and whiz-bang something-for-nothing technology—the bi-VANOS cam adjustment that changes valve timing on the fly, instantaneous throttle response from six motor-

driven butterflies, over a hundred horses per liter. The red line of 8,000 is still too close to the genuine limits of piston speed for my taste—I would happily sacrifice 500 rpm for extended engine life—but as with the M6 V10, the sump features “scavenging” pumps to keep the oil from being marooned in high-speed corners.

And ooo, will there be high-speed corners! The Z4 chassis is already a handling fool, and the M boys have beefed up the roadster. The central-arm rear axle features an anti-roll bar guided by two

track control arms and a longitudinal arm mounted on a central support tucked up into the body of the car. The upper control arm is made of aluminum. A V-bar extends from the rear axle to the floor structure for additional stiffening—think ladder bars and

Firestone ripple-wall slicks. Unlike the other Z4 models, the M roadster features a hydraulic—not electric—power rack-and-pinion steering system. Like the M3 Competition Package, it takes its brakes from the BMW M3 CSL: cast iron discs floating on an aluminum brake cover via cast-in stainless-steel pins. Drilled rotors don't make the brakes any more efficient, but they look way bitchin' and reduce the weight of the brake discs by another pound or so on each corner. The brake package (13.6" front, 12.9" rear) brings the M roadster from 100 kph to zero in just 112 feet. The whole package is good enough to get the Z4 M roadster around the Nürburgring faster than the E46 M3.

The electronic nannies will always be with us, but at least in the M cars, we can lock them in the closet now and then. As BMW Great Britain's PR guys put it, “The DSC logic control system

variable M differential lock, by no means curtailing the proverbial sheer driving pleasure the driver obviously wishes to enjoy in a BMW—and a BMW M car in particular. And should the driver decide to do without DSC in a specific situation, he is able to completely deactivate the system at the touch of a button.”

Remember limited-slip differentials? Instead of the Dynamic Traction Control (DTC) found in the other Z4s, the M car features the variable speed-sensing M differential lock carried over from the M3; it works, but heavy-footed delinquency on a regular basis will make this multiclutch device a frequent R&R candidate. But it beats having DTC take away the throttle when you want to light 'em up. Creative BMW copy writers put it somewhat more euphemistically: “The M limited-slip differential builds up a specific locking force on demand,” they purr, “helping the experienced driver who prefers

ing off the top-up-top down process over and over again.

However, as entertaining and luxurious as it may be to sit in the parking lot playing with the buttons, the real *freude am fahren* comes when you fire up the 147-horsepower four-banger, slip the six-speed into first, and motor off through the German countryside. Finally it all comes together: *This* is why we fell in love with sports cars half a century ago! Snickety-snick-snick through the gears, diving and darting through the forest, every curve singing through the elegant fat steering wheel, feet dancing on the pedals; finally, a car that can really *use* a six-speed transmission! Third, fourth, fifth—uh-oh, drop down three as we brake for a blind right-hander, then catch the revs just *so* as we accelerate past the apex, and upshift again, zoom zoom.

Sweeeeet.

It is a nostalgic delight to recapture the basic relationships between power and weight. Yes, the little Z4 is—like just about everything on the road today—far heavier than it might be, what with air bags and electric motors—yes, you *can* get one with a manual top, but the pushbutton top is so *bitchin'* at the A&W drive-in—and ABS controllers and computers and more electric motors and so on; and at 2,855 pounds, the roadster is no lightweight. It carries twice the pounds per horsepower as, say, its potent new stablemate, the Z4 M roadster.

of the Autobahn, you can ease down the road at an economical pace in top cog; what with the 2.0's 3.38 rear end, official factory squeeze-out-the-last-drop mileage claim for the highway is over 40 mpg, and even their in-town figures are over 20. Real-world drivers like you and me will most likely drive the wheels off the little barker and then be tickled if we've averaged somewhere in the high 20s.

Our calculations are all academic, of course, because we'll never have the chance to find out how cheaply we can drive the 2.0-liter from, say, Spartanburg to Michigan for Oktoberfest: no economy for America! And in truth the 3.0i Sport with the N52 engine may be a better Z4 for the American market, with our appetites for speed and power; the three-liter Z4 provides more horsepower than the E36 M3, and serves up handling we could only dream of Way Back When. And the bad-boy Z4 M roadster carries our obsessions even further; it constitutes the kind of More Is Better outrageous behavior that characterized the Z3 version—that's the one we want, all right, because it's *there*—and I will be the first one to sign up for a road-and-track comparison of M roadsters then and now. Since both get their scoot from the S54 M engine, it may be most instructive to see how far BMW has come in terms of putting a better chassis beneath that potent six-pack.

BMW

has been specifically upgraded and extended for the BMW Z4 M roadster.... The first necessity is to ensure adequate yaw resistance also on slippery surfaces, while the second requirement is not to excessively reduce the car's drive power through the

a very sporting style of motoring and providing assistance on roads with an average-to-high frictional coefficient and thus further enhancing the positive qualities of rear-wheel drive.”

Uh-huh. Go ahead. Light 'em up.—*Satch Carlson*

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It is a nostalgic delight to recapture the basic relationships between power and weight. Yes, the little Z4 is—like just about everything on the road today—far heavier than it might be, what with air bags and electric motors—yes, you *can* get one with a manual top, but the pushbutton top is so *bitchin'* at the A&W drive-in—and ABS controllers and computers and more electric motors and so on; and at 2,855 pounds, the roadster is no lightweight. It carries twice the pounds per horsepower as, say, its potent new stablemate, the Z4 M roadster.

of the Autobahn, you can ease down the road at an economical pace in top cog; what with the 2.0's 3.38 rear end, official factory squeeze-out-the-last-drop mileage claim for the highway is over 40 mpg, and even their in-town figures are over 20. Real-world drivers like you and me will most likely drive the wheels off the little barker and then be tickled if we've averaged somewhere in the high 20s.

Our calculations are all academic, of course, because we'll never have the chance to find out how cheaply we can drive the 2.0-liter from, say, Spartanburg to Michigan for Oktoberfest: no economy for America! And in truth the 3.0i Sport with the N52 engine may be a better Z4 for the American market, with our appetites for speed and power; the three-liter Z4 provides more horsepower than the E36 M3, and serves up handling we could only dream of Way Back When. And the bad-boy Z4 M roadster carries our obsessions even further; it constitutes the kind of More Is Better outrageous behavior that characterized the Z3 version—that's the one we want, all right, because it's *there*—and I will be the first one to sign up for a road-and-track comparison of M roadsters then and now. Since both get their scoot from the S54 M engine, it may be most instructive to see how far BMW has come in terms of putting a better chassis beneath that potent six-pack.

BMW



JOHN VAN WAGEN/REDFERNS



The rich interior of the Z4 belies the Spartan roots of the sports-car culture.



BMW

track control arms and a longitudinal arm mounted on a central support tucked up into the body of the car. The upper control arm is made of aluminum. A V-bar extends from the rear axle to the floor structure for additional stiffening—think ladder bars and

Firestone ripple-wall slicks. Unlike the other Z4 models, the M roadster features a hydraulic—not electric—power rack-and-pinion steering system. Like the M3 Competition Package, it takes its brakes from the BMW M3 CSL: cast iron discs floating on an aluminum brake cover via cast-in stainless-steel pins. Drilled rotors don't make the brakes any more efficient, but they look way bitchin' and reduce the weight of the brake discs by another pound or so on each corner. The brake package (13.6" front, 12.9" rear) brings the M roadster from 100 kph to zero in just 112 feet. The whole package is good enough to get the Z4 M roadster around the Nürburgring faster than the E46 M3.

The electronic nannies will always be with us, but at least in the M cars, we can lock them in the closet now and then. As BMW Great Britain's PR guys put it, “The DSC logic control system

variable M differential lock, by no means curtailing the proverbial sheer driving pleasure the driver obviously wishes to enjoy in a BMW—and a BMW M car in particular. And should the driver decide to do without DSC in a specific situation, he is able to completely deactivate the system at the touch of a button.”

Remember limited-slip differentials? Instead of the Dynamic Traction Control (DTC) found in the other Z4s, the M car features the variable speed-sensing M differential lock carried over from the M3; it works, but heavy-footed delinquency on a regular basis will make this multiclutch device a frequent R&R candidate. But it beats having DTC take away the throttle when you want to light 'em up. Creative BMW copy writers put it somewhat more euphemistically: “The M limited-slip differential builds up a specific locking force on demand,” they purr, “helping the experienced driver who prefers



The Z4's trunk holds a surprising pile of gear—more with the top up.



The two-liter Z4 bites less at the pump than the M roadster—but still nips your wallet.

Meanwhile, back here in Retroland, we are carving up the German canyons, rediscovering the nature of the sports car, remembering what it's like to simply drop the top and go *play*. Sure, it takes a few seconds longer to get up to speed, but that's reminiscent of those real sports cars of yesteryear; there was a day, children, when anything under ten seconds zero-to-sixty was acceptably brisk. The Z4 2.0i's cheerful pace is perfectly appropriate for driving mile after mile after mile, even if it doesn't flatten our eyeballs on acceleration. And we've even made friends with the new toys: The nav system in the Z4 allows us to simply *drive*, zipping down uncharted tarmac paths with no fear that the birds will gobble up the breadcrumbs. Each morning we poke the nav buttons to record our location, then set off on our day's adventure: a gathering of 507s near the *Chiemsee* east of Munich, a vintage rally in the "Five Lakes" district to the south, a visit to the *Tegernsee* a little farther out—no matter. We know our little electronic pal will guide us safely home in the dark.

In fact, while I have long been a bit of a Luddite when it comes to navigation—like Bob Roemer, who says, "My Uncle Sam taught me how to read a map!"—the nav system, which had already proven itself several times over in Munich, really comes to our rescue as we search for our lodgings near Frankfurt. Friends have booked us at a delightful small inn high in the hills above

Königstein, but trying to follow a hand-drawn map with penciled instructions proves frustrating. Finally, however, we think to search the nav system's data base of hotels near our location—where are we, anyway?!—and sure enough, there it is! A few clicks later and we're on our way, trusting the disembodied voice of Ursula, Our Lady of Divine Navigation. And in small German towns, such trust is essential; we "take the next turning on the right" even though it looks like a blind alley—and then deteriorates as it winds up the mountain. Voila! After a couple of blind turns the alley disgorges us onto a two-lane street, and our hotel is on the right—along with the diesel X5 that Jon van Woerden's been hustling around Austria.

If you could have only one car for all reasons, I suppose that X5 would be a logical choice. The Z4, after all, has just enough room for two, and for their luggage if they're not on a very long holiday. It certainly won't do a proper job of hauling Sheetrock or two-by-fours, and a soccer mom would have to deliver the team in shifts. But none of those utilitarian concerns have anything to do with the nature and underlying *raison d'être* of a sports car anyway. BMW discovered that the Z3 sold well as a *reward car*, a prize awarded to oneself at some significant transition: retirement, divorce, whatever. And that's the true legacy of the sports car: It's the gear you need if your chosen sport is *driving*.

Like a favorite baseball glove, the Z4 2.0i soon becomes an extension of your sporting nature, a trustworthy companion, a loyal friend; and unlike those temperamental sports-car friends of long ago, it won't throw a tantrum and leave you stranded, throw up its fluids on a whim, hide its electrons when you need some light. The Z4 is no diva; it will merely carry you, day in, day out, through the tightest corners you can find, *con gusto, con brio*. And Yank to the bone that I am, much as I lust after BMW V12s, V10s, and V8s; much as I crave the fix that only M provides; much as I sneer at anything that takes more than fourteen seconds to wander through a quarter mile—in spite of all that, I find myself charmed by the little two-liter Zed Sled, eager to turn it loose in a new direction, sorry our relationship has to be just a one-week affair. I find myself daydreaming about the possibilities: If it were only destined for America, I'd try to track this particular car through its press-car career and then buy it as a CPO car. Apparently I've bonded with the little varmint; I don't want to think about what those other press bullies will do to my little buddy. Like a washed-up racing greyhound, the little black roadster needs an owner who *understands* it, someone to nurse it back to health after those callous cads abuse it—and if it were possible, I'd give the Z4 2.0i a good home.

Rat shit on the hood and all. ♦