

Getting down to Baur metal



1981 BMW 323i TOP CABRIO

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I think we've been a bit hard on the BMW, always going on about its rust issues. It might be getting a complex. There are so many great things about this car, one of the most impressive being its engine, a terrific piece of BMW engineering.

While the focus has been on restoring the bodywork, my thoughts turned to what else we can do while everything is off the car. The job has escalated somewhat but common sense tells me to do as much as we can while we have the opportunity. And if we are planning this car to last another 35 years, we should do as much as we can within reason... or budget.

When the E21 was launched in July 1975, there was only a choice of four-cylinder M10 engines available. These included the 1.6-litre 316, the 1.8-litre 318, the 2.0-litre 320 and

the 2.0-litre, fuel-injected 320i that used Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection. These cars could readily match the pace of their predecessors, the '02-series including the sporty 2002 tii. With the introduction of the M20 six-cylinder engines, though, things hotted up. The carb-fed 320/6 arrived in late 1977 to replace the two four-cylinder 320s, and the 323i, again with K-Jetronic, topped the range in early 1978, offering 143bhp and 0-60mph in 8sec.

Prior to the restoration, the Baur's engine was running fine with plenty of power. But, given that the engine was out, once again I sought the advice of Jeroen de Laat from bmwE21.net. He says the M20 engines are not known for oil leaks or bearing wear, so if there are no visible issues I may want to keep things simple. (Phew, I thought.)

An inspection of the oil sump will provide many clues. If it's full of dirt and sludge we should check the big-end bearings, but otherwise we'd just refit the sump with a fresh gasket. Another useful check is a compression test. If the results are

good and even, we should leave the engine alone apart from fitting a fresh timing belt, tensioner and water pump, plus a new set of hoses. 'Unless,' Jorean says, 'there is excessive blue smoke or you have experienced high oil consumption, in which case you may want to consider overhauling the head.'

'That's also true if the camshaft has clear traces of wear, which may be caused by abuse, old oil or a

clogged oil-squirter line above the camshaft. But in many cases these engines are just fine and don't need major work.'

Sounds promising. Next time, I'll reveal what actually lay inside the BMW's straight six.

THANKS TO Chedeen Battick at Automo, Jeroen De Laat at bmwE21.net and Gavin Ward at BMW UK - visit www.realoem.com.

