



the success of the 5-Series it was time for an overhaul. Five years and 35 million deutschmarks later the 3-Series emerged in 1975. Yet for all that time and expenditure there didn't seem a lot to get excited about.

With the familiar four-cylinder engine, strut suspension, rear-wheel drive and trailing arm suspension it didn't seem like much more than a made-over '02 range. The only upgrade to get excited about was the rack and pinion steering. Enthusiasts may have noticed the twin-piston brake callipers were switched for singles, although the rear drums were larger. Certainly the E21 was bigger and heavier than the '02s. The wheelbase was 63 mm longer and the 320 was 90 kg heavier. The suspension set-up was on the soft side, but was more stable with stiffer rear springs to reduce pitching.

The European line-up included a 316, 318, 320 and 320i. Essentially these were 2002 units with Solex carburettors and automatic chokes, the 320i using Bosch K-Jetronic injection. All four models were available with a four, or an optional five-speed gearbox and a ZF three-speed automatic was optional from the 318.

From a styling point of view you could see the family resemblance now. Paul Bracq had come up with another masterpiece that looked like a scaled down Five. The interior was also pretty much 5-Series, therefore ergonomically perfect with clear dials and a centre binnacle angled towards the driver.

## Alpina E21s

Initially the E21 was a disappointment in terms of performance, but there was a load of tuning companies waiting to prove what the new 3-Series was capable of. Alpina had been racing, developing and upgrading BMWs for a long time but founder Burkhard Bovensiepen decided in 1978 to build his own models and seek accreditation for Alpina as a manufacturer in its own right (finally happening in 1983).



**THE SEDAN THAT DEFINED PERFORMANCE FOR A GENERATION OF CARS UNFAMILIAR WITH THE TERM.**

THE ULTIMATE DRIVING MACHINE

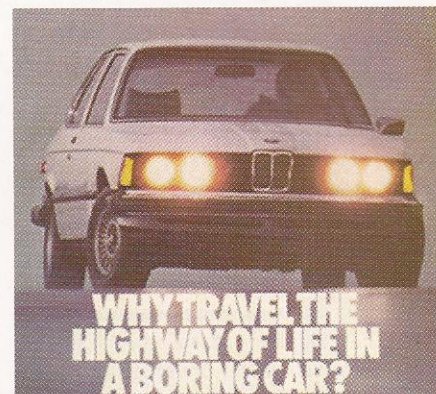
The model that launched the Alpina range was the B6. It was effectively an E21 with a 628i engine installed, although the 200 bhp Alpina extracted made all the difference. They quoted the 0-62 mph time as 7.2 seconds, but road testers could get below seven and top speed was 140 mph.

In 1981 a new induction system saw power rise to 218 bhp, while Alpina also produced its own version of the 323i. Badged as the C1, it produced 170 bhp although sales of the B6 outstripped the C1.

Hartge and Schnitzer also got in on the E21 act, with turbo versions of the 323i. But the award for the most outrageous E21 goes to United States Alpina importer Dietel. They specialised in the larger six-cylinder units like the 2.8, 3.0, 3.3 and 3.5 in standard or an enhanced state of tune.

Their meisterwerk was the Dietel-Alpina 345i, which as the name suggests incorporated the turbocharged 3.5 litre unit from the 745i into an unsuspecting US-spec 320i.

Obviously the suspension and brakes were updated to cope and the E21 even sat on custom-built BBS split-rim alloys, 9x15



**WHY TRAVEL THE HIGHWAY OF LIFE IN A BORING CAR?**

THE ULTIMATE DRIVING MACHINE

at the front and 11x15 at the rear with the bodywork modified to accommodate them.

## Six Pack Saviour

It was all very well that some BMW customers who felt the four-cylinder E21 was a slug bought specialist tuning parts, but there was a majority who wanted their performance delivered more smoothly. The old '02 series had always been intended to have lower-powered 1.3 and 1.6 engines, but circumstances brought about the wonderful 2002 and Turbo.

BMW didn't want to get caught on the hop again so it was always intended that the Three would be able to house >>

## 1977

As the 3-Series gained six-cylinder power, Ford took the triple crown of best selling brand in car, commercial and agricultural vehicle sectors, while for the first time we bought more imported cars than British ones. Michael Edwardes was made chairman of British Leyland and the Rover SD1 was voted car of the year, complete with its Buick V8, derived from the BMW 502 engine taken as war reparation by the US in the '40s.



## 1978

The E21-based B6 saw Alpina establish its claim to be regarded as a manufacturer in its own right, while Chrysler Europe was bought by Peugeot in a bizarre deal clinched for tax reasons in Heathrow airport. The British Motor Show was held at the new National Exhibition Centre for the first time and Lotus was awarded the contract to develop the ill-fated De Lorean.