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BMW 3.0 CSi

BEAUTY ON THE AUTOBAHN

Words & photos: Patrick Quinn

Nowadays, it's hard to imagine that BMW could have been in dire straights during the 1950s and early '60s. The firm may have enjoyed full order books for some years since then, but in those days, the marque was not in high demand.

Aiming to write about a stylish European, my mind went instantly to a model that served as a flagship for the German company and no doubt cemented the good position BMW had gained following the release of the 2002.

The 2800CS and 3.0CS are among the most classically styled models of any European manufacturer. Released in 1968, these models featured the first BMW six-cylinder engine since before WW2, now considered one of the best straight six engines of all time. Constructed with a cast iron block and alloy cylinder head, it has perhaps only been surpassed by the BMW engines of later times.

Dire Straights

During the '50s and '60s, the manufacturer's account books were consistently in the red. The post WW2 years found BMW's managers fumbling as they tried to establish a suitable niche in the market for the company. Their decisions led to the production of vehicles that concentrated on the luxury end of the market, a sector that Mercedes-Benz and, in particular, British makes such as Bentley and Alvis already fully occupied. BMW's offerings were bulbous and grossly overweight for their technically interesting but thirsty V8 engines.

Stuck in a perilous financial state, BMW went to an unexpected source for assistance. In a deliberate



change of direction, BMW approached Italian manufacturer Iso and following their collaboration, the little BMW Isetta was born. Powered by the BMW motorcycle engine, the Isetta brought economical motoring to many Germans who previously could not have afforded it. While the profit from the Isetta was minimal for BMW, it represented a manufacturing success and kept the factory functioning. A plant was even set up in Brighton, England to produce the Isetta for the UK market.

Nevertheless, the late 1950s saw the company heading for bankruptcy and there was even talk of selling out to Mercedes-Benz, much to the chagrin of stockholders. However, just at the right time, the Quandt family entered the scene when Herbert Quandt acquired 30% of the company's shares in early 1960.

New Direction

Just after one year of the Quandts' influence, BMW introduced a new model at the 1961 Frankfurt International Motor Show. Powered with a 1500cc four-cylinder engine, the new BMW 1500 saloon brought to German motorists exactly what they wanted, a well priced, high quality, mass produced motor vehicle with good performance.

The BMW 1500, while suffering from a number of teething problems, eventually grew in stature and performance and in its final guise as the 2002 gained legendary status, especially in turbocharged form. But why did BMW go for a four-cylinder engine, especially after their previous favourable experience with the inline six before the war? Bristol had copied this engine and used it to form the basis of many competition cars.

First and foremost, a four is far more economical to produce and is also lighter. Its light weight was important because it allowed the engine to be placed forward in the chassis, resulting in a better handling car for the average driver. Of course, a four is generally cheaper to run as well, a quality the motoring industry was becoming interested in.

The BMW range of four-cylinder cars was a good seller and the company's account books soon moved into the black. Then in 1965, BMW released the 2000C and 2000CS Coupe as the top of their range. While designed in-house at Munich, the bodies of the Coupes were all built at Karmann in Osnabruck. It was this distinctive body style that proved to be its selling point against such competitors as Mercedes-Benz.

6-Cylinder Coupe

In 1966, BMW engineers produced their new six-cylinder engine based on the four and two years later, their new six-cylinder models in both 4-door saloon and 2-door coupe appeared on the market. The coupe version, called the 2800CS, was a direct carry over from the 2000CS but was extended 3in out front to accommodate the longer engine. Now, they had a car able to compete in the Jaguar and Mercedes-Benz class.

The 2,788cc engine had a bore and stroke of 86x80mm and, with a modest compression of just 9:1, turned out a highly commendable 192bhp at 6,000rpm and 194lb ft of torque. This level of power combined with a weight of 2,990lbs gave the Coupe a top speed of 127mph. Keeping it on the road were MacPherson struts, lower wishbones, coils, tubular shocks and an anti-roll bar, while out back were semi-trailing arms, coils, tubular shocks and anti-roll bar. To stop, BMW settled on front discs and, surprisingly, drums at the rear.

Engine Evolution

Engine capacity was increased to 3 litres (2,985cc) in 1971 and the car re-badged as the 3.0CS. Breathing through twin Zenith 35/40 carburettors, power was down slightly to 180bhp and torque to 185lb but the engine did meet the increasingly stringent US emission laws. Underneath, the Coupe was fitted with a Getrag 4-speed manual box and the brakes were now discs all round. A 3-speed auto



option was also offered in the 3.0 CSA.

One year later, the 3.0CSi appeared, in which the carburetors had given way to Bosch electronic fuel injection. Instantly, power was up to 200bhp giving the model a 137mph top speed. A CSL version was also available, the L standing for Lightweight due to aluminium-alloy doors, boot and bonnet. While the rest of the panels were in steel, it was of a thinner gauge. Needless to say, the majority of the CSL models were built for the track and were also available with an LSD and 17-gallon fuel tank. Over time, the CSL evolved into what became known as the 'Batmobile' that came with front, rear and roof-mounted aerofoils. Good for 150mph, it was one of the most outrageous cars ever to come out of the German motor industry.

From Autobahn to Australia

"It was 1972 and we were in Germany," Jennifer recounted. "I have forgotten where we were going but I can vividly recall being passed by a 3.0CSi and needless to say, it left an impression. I didn't see another one for the whole time we were overseas but then I saw another back in Australia. We were driving to Canberra and one of them passed us again. Not only did it leave a further impression but it made me sit up and realise that the car was also available in Australia."

Jennifer especially admired the lines of the car. "I find that the styling of some cars wins me over and then I must do something about it. The other car I really like is the Mercedes-Benz 190SL. I was so taken with its design that I found and bought one back in 1975, and it still shares the garage with the BMW.

"Straight after seeing the CSi on the road to Canberra, I decided that I wanted one and it would be a matter of scanning the newspapers every week looking for one. That was in 1981 and I finally saw one for sale in the town of Dysart in Queensland. Then over two or three weeks, I communicated with the owner and he sent me a few photos of the car. This was in the days before email so it all took a little time.

"Eventually I decided to go and see for myself what the car was like," Jennifer added. "So I flew up to Brisbane and the owner brought the car down from Dysart." The owner took her out for a drive towards Ipswich and explained that he had owned the car for 4 or 5 years, and before that the owner had been a car dealer in Hobart who had imported it new.

Sleepless Night

"I booked into a motel but spent a sleepless night thinking over whether I would buy it or not," Jennifer said. "Come morning, I said to myself 'What the heck!' and made up my mind there and then. The deal was done first thing in the morning and I was very nervous at the thought of driving it back to Sydney. I did have a gut feeling that everything would be okay but it was a new car for me. I honestly didn't know if there would be a problem or not. I left Brisbane at 9am and it ran like a dream. Twelve hours later I pulled into the driveway at home."

"Right away I started using it as my everyday car," Jennifer said. "After all, it was only 9 years old and still in very good condition. It was love at first sight in 1972 and I felt the same when I bought the car. In my view, it has perfectly beautiful, classic lines. I often see that in so many classic cars but certainly not in modern cars."

I assured Jennifer that her thoughts about the BMW were definitely not unique. I have heard similar thoughts from nearly every classic car enthusiast I have met and feel the same way myself.

Fuel Injection

"I have learnt a lot from the BMW," Jennifer admitted. "Especially about the fuel injected engine, which you have to be very careful about when starting. One time, I took it to a local mechanic who tried to



start it the way you would try to start any other car. He turned on the ignition, pressed the accelerator and turned the engine over – and the next second there were flames everywhere.

“The secret is to keep your foot well away from the accelerator, turn on the ignition, wait a few seconds for the fuel pump to pump enough fuel up to the engine and then turn it over – still without touching the accelerator. Then it always starts without a problem.

“I find it a very intricate car,” Jennifer said, describing her 35-year-old BMW. “There was a period when I went through quite a few problems with the engine missing. It was something to do with the injection sensor but I finally found someone who knows how to keep it running perfectly, although sometimes it still gives a little cough.

Future Plans

“I don’t use it all that often now but when I do, I just love it. It just has a great feeling. It gets used only when I have to and that’s certainly not every weekend, usually because I don’t have the time. Whenever I drive it down the road, people always glance at it because it’s unusual. It has a great feel to it and enough power for me. I don’t think I would drive it as hard as a bloke would but it’s still a lot of fun.

As far as the future goes, Jennifer reckons she will end up giving it to her son. In the meantime, if she had enough money, she would like to have it stripped down and rebuilt. However, she has found that parts can be a problem. Not that many of the model were made to begin with and she suspects there are not many left, most likely owing to rust and the double paneling. During the time she has owned it, she has had to spend quite a bit having rust removed. Over the years, many people have suggested that she sell the car. “But I still get a thrill every time I drive it, so I intend to keep it for some time yet,” said Jennifer.

Irresistible Touring

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder - and all that stuff! But I honestly think that the BMW six-cylinder CS coupes are the best looking model to ever come out of the Bavarian Motor Werks. It looks low and has an aggressive stance that will appeal to many enthusiasts.

I suspect that it was probably from too little use but the CSi’s engine was misbehaving on the day I met Jennifer and her car, although it was nothing that a thorough warming and a good hard run wouldn’t fix. Under the forward opening bonnet is an impressive sight, especially the fuel injection induction stretching across the engine. Inside the cabin is a typical early 1970s interior, with lots of timber veneer and leather giving off an almost irresistible aroma.

In a way, Jennifer was right - it would make the basis of a perfect and relatively straightforward restoration. However, if it were my car, it would suit me perfectly for touring. I could imagine barreling along the Victoria’s Great Ocean Road and taking in the sights – what bliss.



