

CLASSIC DRIVER

Modern Classics: BMW Z8



Legend has it that when BMW bosses Bernd Pischetsrieder and Wolfgang Reitzle held a leaving party for a senior colleague in 1993, they added a bit of nostalgic atmosphere with a display of older BMW models. One such was the opulent, sporting 507 of the late 1950s and as they stood there admiring it they decided that a new BMW V8 super-luxury roadster would be a very good thing.

The bosses' party chat produced a result. Four years on, the **BMW Z07** concept car was unveiled at the **1997 Tokyo Auto Show**. Obviously inspired by the 507, it had been designed at **BMW DesignworksUSA** under **Henrik Fisker**. Although it might have been a mere styling exercise, it had been created with the possibility of production in mind. Reaction to the **Z07** was so positive in **Tokyo** that BMW went ahead and built a slightly modified version, the exclusive and incredibly expensive **Z8** which was to be hand-built at the rate of just 10 cars a day.

Launched in 2000, it was seen on screen in 1999 as **James Bond's** new toy in the film ***The World is Not Enough***. That Z8, like all the others, had an impressive six cup-holders; but it was also equipped with two retractable, side-mounted surface-to-air missiles which Bond was able to launch with a multi-tasking control on the steering wheel. He was also able to drive it by remote control, standing some distance away and just using the key.

Production models were not that comprehensively equipped but they were not far off it. Every sophisticated gadget you could imagine was built into the **Z8**, which was a genuine new design and not cobbled together from some existing floorpan. It was constructed around an advanced aluminium spaceframe chassis, making the car extremely strong and surprisingly light for its size. The aluminium outer panels were bolted to the chassis and, in true 1950s style, plenty of shiny brightwork was added.



No less than six feet wide between its chrome-embellished mirrors, it weighed in at 1585kg, making it 180kg lighter than the contemporary **M5** which shared the same 394bhp, 4941cc V8 engine. That produced a stunning 0-60mph time of under five seconds for the **Z8**, and a top speed of over 160mph.

At first, it came with a six-speed manual gearbox only but towards the end of production, which finished in

June 2003, just over one hundred **Alpina Z8s** were built. These had BMW's five-speed **Steptronic** automatic transmission, a softer ride and an engine that was retuned to give less power but more torque. Despite its bulk, the original **Z8** was intended to be an all-out sports car whereas the Alpina model was more suited to cruising the boulevards.

The combination of successful retro looks and outstanding build quality made many people see it as an instant classic and that is exactly what has happened to many of the 5703 Z8s made. As many as 56% of them were chosen in the **Titanium Silver** finish, mostly with a black interior, and that was probably the most attractive combination. Although people said there were more sporty cars and there were more luxurious cars, accusing the **Z8** of being neither one thing nor the other, nobody claimed it was anything other than stunningly beautiful.



The UK price when new was a mighty £80,000 and many of the cars spent most of their time locked away, cosseted but rarely used, in the garages of wealthy owners. Only 70 Z8s a year were allocated for sale in the UK and **BMW** did not manage to sell that many, partly because they were all left-hand drive. The survival rate, however, seems quite remarkable. Consequently, there's no shortage of perfectly maintained, unmarked **Z8s** available today, many with very low mileages. Typical asking prices are above £70,000 with the very best of them around £100,000.

The **Z8** is seen today by **BMW** as a fascinating milestone in automotive technology. With its sleek lines and soft folding roof, thanks to its looks alone the Z8 was undeniably one of the most outstanding cars of its time. In its proportions and its styling it was indeed a faithful modern interpretation of the old **507**.

Ten years on, what was once hailed as an instant classic is evolving into a genuine classic car. Those who continue to doubt its true sporting potential should be reminded that BMW's test drivers were able to lap the **Nürburgring Nordschleife** with a Z8 in a remarkable 8 minutes, 15 seconds.

You rather fancy a **BMW Z8** now, don't you? Click [HERE](#) to see the **BMW Z8s** available in the **Classic Driver** car database.

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