

CLASSIC DRIVER

BMW K1600 GT & GTL: First Ride



Clarence Drive is a truly outstanding road that clings to the gloriously spectacular coastline about an hour or so southeast of Cape Town.

Now, I've driven some fine coastal roads in my time, from California's Highway One to the French and Italian Rivas and the Isle of Wight's wonderful A3055, but Clarence Drive is arguably the best of them.

But I wasn't here by accident, as BMW had done its homework prior to the press launch of its all-new K1600 GT and GTL models. Having just previously ridden some terrific mountain roads en route from our base near Franschhoek toward the lunch stop in Hermanus, the sinuous Clarence Drive turned out to be the icing on the cake, while also providing the best possible platform to demonstrate the K1600's genuinely impressive dynamic capabilities.



Up until now, if you wanted a BMW with a powerful straight-six engine and one that was available with an adaptive Xenon headlamp system, ABS and traction control, cruise control, satnav with voice control, tyre-pressure control, seat heating, electronic suspension adjustment, central locking, a trip computer, Bluetooth and an audio system with USB/iPod connectivity, and one that could dash quite effortlessly to over 150mph, then you'd have had to settle for a car. Not any more.

However, before you jump to the conclusion that the new K1600s may be little more than unwieldy interstate cruisers, then be assured that nothing could be further from the truth. Yes, they're dripping with technology and creature comforts but, more importantly, they go like stink, steer and ride sublimely and provide a far more visceral and exciting riding experience than their maxi-scooter looks might have you believe.



At first glance, differences between the two are subtle, save for the GTL's luxuriously appointed top case. Look a little closer, however, or - better still - go for a ride, and the different characteristics of the two models soon become apparent.

Both are powered by BMW's new and incredibly compact in-line six. Both also share the same basic rolling chassis, but they have slightly different suspension settings, while the GTL has a more laid-back, less sporty riding position due to its lower seat height (multiple seating options are available for both) and repositioned handlebars and foot pegs.



At 24 litres, the GT's fuel tank is 2.5l smaller than the GTL's (both are good for well over 200 miles between fill-ups), but what's immediately apparent is that the GT's fabulously raspy exhaust note is sharp enough to cut diamond. Though still tuneful, volume is muted on the more grown-up GTL.

The K1600's 160.5bhp doesn't break outright power records, but it's not the quantity but the quality of its creamy torque that makes this engine so different, and so intoxicating. Revving oh-so-smoothly and freely to a modest 8500rpm (with peak power at 7750rpm), it's almost akin to operating a giant electrical dimmer switch. There are three selectable engine power modes but, unless conditions are tricky, then the most responsive, full-power Dynamic mode is best.



Acceleration? BMW claims 0-62mph in just 3.2 seconds for the GT and 3.4 sec for the GTL, so being first away from the lights shouldn't be an issue. If there is a flaw in the K1600's power delivery it's that, like many other multi-cylinder motorcycles, at very low speeds progress can be a little jerky without feathering the clutch to smooth things out.



It was perhaps to be expected that the six-cylinder engine would be a masterpiece, but BMW's chassis engineers have been no less fastidious in their pursuit of perfection. Despite weighing around a third of a tonne and having a relatively long wheelbase, the K1600s steer and turn with consummate ease. Pick a line and BMW's Duolever front end will stick to it determinedly. Their mass is noticeable while performing a slow U-turn on full lock, but at higher speeds there's ample ground clearance when cornering hard, and should you hit a bump while leant over, the machine remains composed and unflustered.

So, the new K1600s are graced with all the gizmos that current technology allows, but more importantly the chassis, steering and engine fundamentals are all delightfully spot-on. Just as BMW's S1000RR set new standards in the super-sports category last year, so will the new K1600s in the super-tourer class this year.



The K1600s go on sale in the UK on 20 March.

Models are: GT, GT SE, GTL, GTL SE

Prices OTR: from £15,265 (GT) to £17,615 (GTL SE)

ABS is standard on all, but only the SE versions come with adaptive headlight and Dynamic Traction Control

Options fitted to press demo machines included:

Audio system with satnav preparation (£1,050.00)

BMW Navigator IV (£576.00)

Electronic Suspension Adjustment (£705.00)

Comfort Package - ESA, alarm & central locking (£1,000.00)



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