

CLASSIC DRIVER

Driven: BMW 1-Series M Coupé



Perhaps annoyingly to some, the 1-Series M Coupé hasn't been allowed to inherit the name of the legendary M1 sports car. But maybe this is the right decision; after all, the 1-Series M is more of a spiritual successor to the E30 M3 than the Giugiaro-styled, mid-engined icon of the late seventies.

For many, the flared wheelarches and Tarmac-hugging bumpers of the 1M will instantly evoke memories of the much-loved E30 M3. Tipping the scales at 1570kg, it may be quite a bit heavier than the car it emulates, but the 335bhp that its 3.0-litre twin-turbo straight-six produces ensures that the 1M is no slouch.

Once we've finished visually comparing the exterior of BMW's new baby to its elderly relative, it's time to see what this Valencia Orange (if you don't like it, you'll have to make do with white or black) 1M brings to the table. And before we start, we're already optimistic – for a while we'd started to worry that BMW's M division had been relegated to applying its magic and hallowed badge to 4x4s, and wasn't coming back...



But this was never going to be the case. While the current financial climate necessitates that business always comes first – even for a manufacturer as flush as BMW – the M division was always going to prefer bestowing

its expertise on a compact coupé rather than an X-something-or-other. That being said, the Bavarian bean-counters haven't completely left M to its own devices; inside there have obviously been restrictive measures, with the orange-stitched seats and a slightly-too-chunky steering wheel being the only things disguising a direct import of the interior from an entry-level 1-Series. M division can be forgiven for this, however, as it has managed to keep the price just below £40,000, and way clear of the circa £55,000 BMW asks for an M3.

This doesn't mean that the little M-car has nothing in common with its bigger brother, though. In fact, it's quite the contrary; its huge brakes are handed down, as are the majority of its suspension components. But within a few minutes of getting behind the wheel, you discover that the most impressive borrowed feature is the manual six-speed gearbox. The short throws and near-perfect ratios remind you that this is a car which was really only built with one priority in mind: driving pleasure. We're more than happy that flappy-paddle set-ups have been kept for the bigger M-cars, such as the [new M5](#).





In common with the M5, though, the 1M relies on twin-turbocharging to realise the performance required of an M-car. And like the big saloon, it's implemented pretty well. Lag is *almost* non-existent, and power delivery is just about as close in character to a normally aspirated engine as we've experienced from any turbocharged car thus far. Even more surprising is the torque that BMW has blessed it with; it has more at 1500rpm than the M3 has at any point in its rev range, and in real-world driving we'd like to bet that the smaller sibling would be quicker point-to-point. With a 0-60 time of 4.9 seconds as well as a weight around 150kg less than the M3, BMW should be commended for not reigning in the 1M just for marketing purposes.



Being rear-wheel drive with a limited-slip differential, it's hardly surprising that it doesn't take much encouragement for the stubby back end of the 1M to 'come out to play'. For those who like to play a little safer, even with the electronic safety systems turned on (which is crucial in wet weather in this car, may we add), the M division has managed to make them work excellently without ever being obtrusive. However, when you're not in a playful mood, the suspension set-up seems overly harsh and the drone from the straight-six and its tailpipe quartet can grow a little tiresome, as can the wind noise at cruising speeds.

But then again, refinement was clearly always going to be quite a way down the 1M's priority list. To own this car, you need to have a similar character to the car itself; lively and excitable. Unfortunately, letting that character influence your right foot a little too often will result in regular trips to the pumps. We were surprised how early into our drive the fuel light interrupted proceedings; yes, time flies when you're having fun, but less than 190 miles on one tank of fuel?



The entertainment the 1M provides in return, however, makes it a small price to pay, especially when you've paid £15,000 less than an M3 with real-world performance which near enough matches its bigger brother. Not to mention that only 450 will be made in right-hand drive, which instantly makes it a possible candidate for

modern classic status. Fair enough, it may not have the precision of a Cayman or the discipline of the four-wheel-drive TT-RS in wet weather, but the 1M offers old-school driving thrills in a way we haven't experienced in many years. Since the E30 M3, in fact.

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