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BMW M6: The Tip of the Iceberg

Lead

Black, wide and brutal-looking: few cars look as menacing as this, the latest BMW M6. It's almost bad enough to make you forget your good manners – and we've just taken it for a run in the Alps.

Just one hour's drive from Zurich, high above the city, the mountains are now white with snow and the wind swirls with ice crystals. This, truly, is the beast risen from the depths of Lake Walen. Except that instead of crawling from the bowels of the earth, this car was born in the laboratories of BMW M GmbH, in Munich. Every sinew of the muscular bodywork strains to cover massive chromed low-profile wheels. With LED headlamps ablaze, the 'Phantom Menace' stalks the German Autobahn like no other. And if Hollywood is searching for the next evil villain's car, well, movie moguls, mosey on down to Munich.





It seems a long time ago (1984 model year) that a 286bhp M635 CSI took its place at the top of the Bavarian company's coupé range. For 2012, the 1900kg M6 has at its disposal 560bhp – enough for a 4.2-second 0-62mph time. That's 'in the lab', or at least 'on paper'. The reality is something more akin to flying a modern fighter plane. The cockpit is all black: leather or carbonfibre. The centre console contains the buttons and switches to control the suspension settings and the throttle and steering response parameters. The car begs to be aimed at corners, with the turbocharged V8 whistling and roaring like the afterburners of an air force jet.





When BMW decided to drop the V10 engine and fit future M6s with 'only' a V8, many customers were concerned that the model's legendary thrust would disappear. Well, for those unimpressed by peak torque of 680Nm, we say there's no pleasing you. Removing two cylinders from the M6's engine means that the car is now lighter, bringing the performance back up to scratch. And the 7-speed 'M' twin-clutch transmission means that acceleration from zero to the limited top speed of 250km/h is seamless. At that speed BMW drops the shutters but, as an option, experienced drivers can enjoy a maximum of 305km/h.



And you can't criticise BMW for using its electrical wizardry with too heavy a hand, in its attempt to create a safety net to keep the car on the road. In comparison with many other high-performance coupés, in fact, the

latest M6 is a touch on the nervous and aggressive side: not one for timid novices. The tail wants to step out from time to time, but that's part of its appeal and – with practice – a useful way of driving swiftly from point to point. While we might miss the 'stealth sports car' style of the M635i CSI, the buyer who has spent more than 120,000 euros on a new M6 wants others to know about it, and is happy to be seen in the spotlight.



This principle applies to the entire 'M' range, from M3 right up to the soon-to-be-reviewed M6 Gran Coupé. When [BMW created its Motorsports department 40 years ago](#), its racing cars were fast, loud and colourful – and its road cars discreetly understated. Nowadays, what was good enough for Ronnie Petersen and Hans-Joachim Stuck – dazzlingly vivid colour schemes with wings, spoilers and giant wheels – is mainstream production. That's (market-driven) progress for you.

Photos: Jan Baedeker

Gallery

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