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BMW 340i Touring – Road Test

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SPACE AND PACE - THE NEW BMW 340i TOURING.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

(All interior photographs of the right-hand drive test car by David).

BMW has a vast array of model ranges, Saloons, Touring estates, Active and Gran Tourer MPVs, Coupés and Gran Coupés, Convertibles, Sports Cars, SUV X models and an increasing number of current and future 'I' all-electric models. Backing up this formidable array of body types of course are multiple trim and spec options, including the iconic 'M' performance brand. In addition BMW offers petrol, diesel, hybrid, plug-in hybrid and all-



electric powertrains with 2WD and xDrive traction options as well.

BMW UK prices of course vary enormously across this wide range of model types starting from around £24,500 for a 1 Series 118i petrol small hatchback up to £130,500 for an M8 Competition Convertible 625 hp.

For this week's road test I'm trying a model somewhere near the practical end of the huge and varied model line-up but with BMW's new high performance M340i six cylinder turbocharged petrol power unit with xDrive traction. So space and pace are on offer with the new M340i Touring estate.

The new 3 Series Touring range on-the-road prices start from £32,935 for the 318i petrol with the 318d diesel costing £36,420. Customers wanting to go the petrol/electric PHEV plug-in hybrid route can choose the 330e priced from £40,845. The most expensive model is my test version, the new M340i xDrive which costs £51,780 but for high driving mileage business execs there is a diesel version - the M340d xDrive at £51,005.



From the BMW price list I counted 37 different core models in the 3 Series Touring range; 18 diesel, 11 petrol and 8 PHEVs. The main spec levels, depending on the engine option chosen, are SE, Sport, M Sport, M Sport Pro Edition then the xDrive variants of those same spec listings. Right at the top of the estate range are the outright performance M340i xDrive and M340d xDrive versions. It is a similar line-up for the 3 Series Saloon range as well but that line-up will soon get the hot-shot M4 450 hp turbo petrol variant - but it's not for the Touring estate line-up so my M340i 374 hp turbo petrol model is as 'hot' as it gets for the estate line-up. For reference the M340d diesel Touring has 340 hp.

The new BMW 3 Series Touring is the sixth generation of this five door estate range covering 33 years and close to two million global sales. Today it faces stiff sales competition from conventional premium brand family estates such as the Audi A4 Avant, Mercedes C Class Estate and Volvo V60, but unlike its early predecessors it also has to face the



competition from numerous SUVs including BMW's own X3 range.

The latest 3 Series Touring has larger exterior dimensions than its predecessor. It has grown by 76 mm (2.99 in) to 4,713 mm (15.46 ft) in length, by 16 mm (0.63 in) to 1,827 mm (5.99 ft) in width and by 11 mm (0.43 in) to 1,440 mm (4.72 ft) in height. The wheelbase has also been extended by 41 mm (1.61 in) to 2,851 mm (9.35 ft), plus 43 mm (1.69 in) added to the front track (1,587 mm or 5.21 in) and 21 mm (0.83 in) to the rear track (1,604 mm or 5.26 in)

The load area offers 500 litres (17.66 cu.ft) of space with the three rear seats in use and with the rear seat backs folded down this goes up to a reasonable 1,510 litres (17.66 cu.ft). Given the 3 Series Touring is the smallest estate in the extensive BMW line-up it is a practical size if not quite matching that of a comparable SUV. Likewise the rear seat legroom has improved over previous versions but it's still not ample for adult passengers.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

Far more important to potential owners of the new M340i version in my hands is what is under the bonnet. Yes it's a 'straight-six' petrol engine with M TwinPower Turbo technology which uses a twin-scroll turbocharger, direct injection, ValveTronic variable valve timing and Double-Vanos variable camshaft timing for intake and exhaust sides. The turbocharger system is positioned within the cast-steel manifold to optimise space.



The outcome of this new design is 374 hp of power up to 6,500 rpm and 500 Nm (369 Nm) of torque, a huge spread of 'grunt' available from 1,850 to 5,000 rpm. The outcome is huge response more or less right through the entire rev-range so it's just as good at giving easy, smooth power delivery at low speeds as it is at producing extra 'grunt' at high cruising speeds. Top speed is restricted to 155 mph with the zero to 62 mph acceleration time of just 4.5 seconds.

Those figures are very appealing for driving enthusiasts but the tax costs are not so agreeable. The latest WLTP Combined Cycle figure is 33.2 to 33.6 mpg and my week of motoring covering all types of roads and traffic conditions was a very accurate 33.8 mpg. It



just goes to show big engines don't work as hard as highly stressed smaller capacity units so they more easily match their real-life and official fuel consumption data. As for CO2 emissions, now at 191 g/km under the new (from April) WLTP ratings, all that power and performance does have extreme running cost tax consequences. The VED First Year rate road tax bill is now £1,305 followed by £150 Standard rate and with the £325 annual supplement for five years as the estate costs over £40k. The BiK company car tax is the maximum 37% and insurance Group 38E.

If all those figures sound bad then the exhaust soundtrack does not and its tone will lift any petrol-head's spirits. The M Sport exhaust system provides that six cylinder burble on start-up but when Sport or Sport+ modes are selected a flap controller enriches the twin exhaust system's tones even further. I know it's 'automotive window dressing' but why not, given how much this high performance version of a family estate model costs.

Drive to the wheels is via the latest eight speed Steptronic Sport auto transmission with ideally spaced close ratios allowed by the wide spread high torque output of the straight-six engine. Gear changes can also be done manually via the gear selector lever or shift paddles on the steering wheel. For even more performance there is a launch control function as well - not that a family estate really needs one. The xDrive all wheel drive facility has a rear-biased setup to maintain the true sports driving experience of an M car. The rear end driving bias can be appreciated more in Sport and Sport+ modes, increasing the agility and driveability during fast cornering conditions. For added traction the M340i also has an M Sport fully variable locking rear differential for improved start-off traction and extreme cornering grip requirements.

The model also has as standard a 10 mm (0.39 in) lowered ride height M Sport suspension with revised damper settings, to reduce rebound front and rear and to restrict body-roll during cornering. Adjustments to the suspension performance can be made in all driving modes from Sport+ to Comfort and Eco Pro settings. And for good measure the M340i Touring also thankfully has M Sport braking with four-pot callipers at the front and single piston floating callipers at the rear. All callipers carry blue paintwork and the M logo.



Wheels are 18-inch M light alloys shod with mixed size tyres - 225/45 R18 at the front and 255/40 R18 at the rear.

The tech-spec M Sport upgrades are huge and the styling enhancements turn what is a good looking compact family estate into something a shade more edgy, not brash but classy.



The front apron, side skirts and rear end have all been designed to optimise the air cooling



needed for the drivetrain plus of course enhancing the aerodynamics. There is another new treatment of the BMW kidney grille, this time with mesh inserts, it doesn't look classic BMW but it might have been worse like other recent grille designs have been. There are trapezoidal exhaust tailpipes, M rear spoiler and the must-have discreet M badging around the estate's body

Standard interior equipment includes front sports seats upholstered in an M-specific combination of Sensatec and Alcantara, an M leather steering wheel with multifunction buttons and shift paddles, M pedals, M-specific floor mats 'M340i' lettering appears in the digital instrument cluster and also on the front door sill plates.

All the equipment you might expect is included, everything from three-zone air conditioning, Park Distance Control, BMW Live Cockpit, a brilliant sat-nav system including real time traffic information and the usual safety and connectivity functions.

However BMW UK still managed to fit over £7ks worth of options to my test car giving a final on the road price of close to £59k which however much you enjoy hard-core driving performance is unrealistically steep for what is essential an upmarket family estate car. I digress but as an example a couple of the extra cost options were upgraded auto and laser lighting pack at £1,500 and the technology pack with head-up display, BMW Gesture Control, uprated surround sound and WiFi hotspot preparation etc, costing £1,900.

VERDICT

The new BMW M340i xDrive Touring will be a memorable test car for me, not because of its high cost but because of its huge and refined performance. With no pure M3 Touring version due, unlike the new M3 Saloon, the M340i is as close as we will get to having an M3 Touring estate so enjoy it - I did very much!

For: Practical family or business estate car with almost all the iconic BMW 'M' thoroughbred high performance, stunning engine/drivetrain, impeccable handling, classy sports exterior styling, excellent interior quality.



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Against: Huge cost to own one in purchase/lease costs and tax penalties, not that roomy for rear seat adult passengers, some options should be standard fit for this price.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

BMW M340i xDrive Touring.

Price: £51,780 (with options £58,735).



Engine/transmission: 3 litre, straight six cylinder, M TwinPower turbo direct injection petrol with variable valve control and variable camshaft timing, 374 hp up to 6,500 rpm, 500 Nm (369 lb.ft) of torque from 1,850 to 5,000 rpm, 8-speed Steptronic auto/manual transmission, xDrive variable 4WD, sports limited slip differential, launch control.

Performance: 155 mph (restricted), 0 - 62 mph 4.5 seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle 33.2 - 33.6 mpg (33.8 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 191 g/km, VED First Year road tax £1,305 then Standard rate of £150 plus £340 annually for five years as the vehicle costs over £40k, BiK company car tax 37%.

Insurance Group: 38E.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,713 mm (15.46 ft), W 1,827 mm (5.99 ft), H 1,440 mm (4.72 ft), wheelbase 2,851 mm (9.35 ft), boot/load space 500 to 1,510 litres (17.66 to 53.32 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.