

drive



TECHNICAL SPECS

MODEL: BMW 328I

ENGINE: 2.0 LITRE TURBO-CHARGED

FOUR-CYLINDER

0-100KM: 5.9 SECONDS

TOP SPEED: 250KM/H

Three's a wow

BMW design favours familiarity over innovation. Does the new Three series finally break the mould?

/WATTS ON WHEELS with Derek Watts/



I spent a week with a Golden Bear at Casalinga Restaurant in Muldersdrift

one night: Jack Nicklaus! With a record 18 Majors under his belt, I was upbeat at the prospect of meeting this legend of the fairways at the launch of a new golf estate. And this was no meet and greet. We were elbow to elbow at a cosy table for five.

Now, Jack is the archetypical wholesome all-American. He answered all our questions, talked about the changing face of golf, his family and his morning workouts in the gym. At least, between yawns.

And I don't expect him to give a rat's ass about the 2m stretch of misery to his left. But after three hours in each other's

company you expect maybe just one question in exchange – even if it's just “What the hell are you doing here?”

The fact is that Jack is very comfortable in his own bearskin and really doesn't feel the need to make an effort. And that, up to now, is the way I've felt about BMW's evolving Three series over the past decade or so: a masterpiece of engineering and a big thrill behind the wheel...held back by dozy designers who feel that BMW owners want more of the same for every “new” model, and seem too scared to put out a real head-turner.

I asked myself, would that apply to the brand new Three?

I was introduced to the lighter, larger 328i at Zwartkops raceway. And I certainly wouldn't have guessed that they'd lost two cylinders along the way!

In fact, to throw so much turbo-charged punch from less than 2 litres of displacement should be illegal. My own adrenalin boost got me going into a tight right-hander with a tad too much enthusiasm, and it was only thanks to the gazillion hidden driving aids that I didn't end up against a wall.

Maybe I needed that heads up display, which is an optional extra in this category for the first time.

Let it be said that the Munich *mense* have got all those



complicated elements like drag coefficient, transmission logic and steering ratio right on the button. There are people who write about this stuff!

For my money the manual is a pretty perfect sub-six second drive and the eight speed auto is getting good reviews. Plus you're using less juice and expelling less pollution out of your exhaust – on the car that is.

So if the 328i is this much fun...bring on a track day with the 335i!

But there is that elephant in the room. Have the designers done enough with the sixth generation? Well, the new Three has been described as an injection of Z4 at the front with a Five Series boot grafted on the rear. Certainly it has a pointier snout, while inside it's the classy BMW layout featuring the iDrive system I've come to know and even understand.

Probably the closest you can get to an eye-catching design change is ordering the Sport Line with more aggressive features— a shiny black kidney grille, black surrounds to the air intakes and some tasteful red accents indoors.

In the final analysis I have to agree with my *Top Gear* colleagues. There is nothing radical. Just a good freshen up.

But if you rate personality and performance above looks...go for it!