

# OUR CARS

A week in the life of Autocar's fleet

## ALPINA D3 BITURBO COUPE 6500-MILE FINAL REPORT

**PRICE** £32,950 **PRICE AS TESTED** £34,020 **OPTIONS** Metallic paint £535, Bluetooth phone preparation £535, 19in Dynamic alloys (no cost) **ECONOMY** 44.5mpg  
**FAULTS** None **EXPENSES** None **WHY WE RAN IT** To see if Alpina has made the greatest everyday 3-series **PREVIOUS REPORTS** 5.11.08, 17/24.12.08, 7.1.09

Alpina's fast, frugal D3 coupé has proved such a capable all-rounder that we can't help but wonder why BMW doesn't do one of it's own

### Second opinion...

**Matt Saunders**

This is the car that should have won our Christmas long-term shootout. Fast, frugal, refined, desirable, fun... it could well be the most complete coupé I've ever driven.





D3 is a comfortable long-distance cruiser, with a 600-mile range



#### ENGINE

Updated twin-turbo 2.0-litre diesel is refined, punchy and more economical than a 325d.



#### ALLOY WHEELS

Optional 19in Dynamic alloys are an attractive alternative to the regular Alpina rims.



#### DASH

Free of the usual options, the D3 is refreshingly straightforward – and perfectly adequate.

**Love it,  
loathe it**



#### FUEL ECONOMY

While a 44mpg average is not to be sneezed at, we were hoping for closer to 50mpg.



#### ACCESS TO REAR

Front seats tip and slide, but it's still a squeeze to get in – and rear head room is tight.

WHOEVER SAID that you can't teach an old dog new tricks was talking nonsense. And this car, the Alpina D3 Biturbo coupé, proves it.

In the space of just a few months, this car has demonstrated that BMW's unofficial tuning partner has the capacity to not only build an incredibly capable motor car but also make a car to a price and, frankly, embarrass its donor manufacturer. We've notched up 6500 miles in our D3, and none of us can fathom why its twin-turbocharged 2.0-litre diesel engine remains restricted to the 123d.

To recap, the D3 is, in effect, a rival for BMW's 325d, which uses a detuned version of the firm's 3.0-litre, six-cylinder oil-burner. By slotting the 123d's four-cylinder diesel into a 3-series and giving it a mild retune (power is up by 7bhp, to 211bhp, and torque goes from 295lb ft to 332lb ft), Alpina ends up with a car that has the legs on its mainstream rival in pretty much every area. It has 14bhp and 37lb ft more, is 0.4sec quicker from 0-62mph and can hit 152mph compared with 148mph.

And here's the punchline: it does all of this while returning better fuel economy (a claimed 52mpg against 49.6mpg) and producing less CO<sub>2</sub> (143g/km versus 153g/km). Oh, and it



includes a tasteful body kit, natty 19in alloys (around which are strapped regular tyres, not runflats) and a little more street cred, all for virtually the same price (the D3 lists at £32,950).

That's a lot of figures, but they add up to a dramatic departure for Alpina, which has made its name by taking BMW's range-toppers and adding more pace and often garish interiors. The need to make the D3 at the 325d's price point has removed that threat; its interior is remarkably restrained, with just a couple of badges, blue dials, a little bit of coloured stitching on the steering wheel and a small numbered plaque to differentiate the cabin from that of a regular 3-series.

We stuck to this no-nonsense approach when spec'ing up our D3, our only options being Titanium Silver metallic paint and Bluetooth connectivity (£535 each). That meant no sat-nav, merely half-leather seats and BMW's regular 'Professional' single-CD audio system (without iPod connectivity), but it also kept the price as tested to a reasonable £34,020. We also went for Dynamic alloys instead of Alpina's trademark Classics but this is a no-cost option.

With restrained spec'ing like that, you expect a car to deliver on the brief to which it was built, and the D3 has done that. Even on 19in rims, its ride is at least the equal of a regular 3-series (in fact, it's arguably better than an M Sport 3-series on 18s), with only increased road noise to suggest that you're on larger wheels. The 3-series' chassis remains finely balanced and the steering, while heavy, is wonderfully communicative. The six-speed manual gearbox needs →

**'Alpina ends up with a car that has the legs on its mainstream rival, the 325d, in pretty much every area'**

You wait ages for an Alpina... It's goodbye D3 coupé, hello estate

## 4 MONTHS ON...

BUYING

### TEST STARTED 3.10.09

Mileage at start 560

Mileage at end 6980

### Prices

List price then £32,950

List price now £32,950

Price as tested £34,020

### Value now

Trade £27,500

Private £29,000

Dealer £30,850

**Options** Metallic paint £535, Bluetooth phone preparation £535, 19in Dynamic alloy wheels (no cost)

THIRST

### FUEL CONSUMPTION

Claimed 52.3mpg

Test average 44.5mpg

Test best 46.7mpg

Test worst 42.4mpg

Fuel tank 61 litres

Real-world range 597 miles

STOP AND GO

### PERFORMANCE

0-60mph 6.9sec

Top speed 152mph

### ENGINE

Layout 4 cyls in line, longitudinal, 1995cc, twin-turbodiesel

Max power 211bhp at 4100rpm

Max torque 332lb ft at 2000-2500rpm

**TRANSMISSION** 6-spd manual

BOOT 440 litres

**WHEELS** 8x19in (f), 9x19in (r), alloy

**TYRES** 245/35 ZR19 (f), 265/35 ZR19 (r)

**WEIGHT** 1480kg

FINANCES

### SERVICE/RUNNING COSTS

Contract hire rate na

CO<sub>2</sub> 143g/km

Service costs na

Other costs na

Fuel costs £681.53

Running costs inc fuel £681.53

Running costs per mile 11p

Depreciation £6520

Cost per mile including depreciation £1.12

Faults None

EXPERIENCE

### DEALERS

The Alpina's short spell with us meant that we didn't need to go near a dealership. But theoretical concerns about having to send the car to Nottingham were unfounded: we'd already earmarked Sytner in Sunningdale as a likely location.

### DEPRECIATION

Alpina doesn't sell many cars in the UK – it probably doesn't shift many more than 100 D3 Biturbos in a year – and that rarity value, plus a well established dealer network (Sytner), helps to keep secondhand values at decent levels.

Six-month-old D3 Biturbo coupés with similar mileages to ours (ex-demonstrators, mainly) are available at Sytner's for just under £31k, indicating that the Nottingham-based dealer network would probably buy at £27,500. That equates to a worst case scenario of 19 per cent depreciation – in six months.

However, the Alpina's low CO<sub>2</sub> figure would help with VED rate changes, and fuel economy of more than 44mpg would keep diesel bills and running costs to a respectable level, particularly as the miles rack up.

NEW OR USED?



Non-runflat tyres do wonders for the ride, even on 19in alloys

← a positive action, but it is slick if you're decisive enough.

The curious thing is that, despite being a different kind of Alpina, the D3 ultimately reverts to the brand's strengths, in that it is effortlessly rapid and a comfortable long-distance cruiser. Will Powell happily scooted to Brussels and back on a little over a single fill of diesel, and I managed my Christmas sojourn to and from Northern Ireland from Hampshire on about a tank and a third. Sure, sat-nav and a CD multichanger would have made the journey a touch easier, but it's hard to argue with the excellent driving position, supportive seats and a range of more than 600 miles. This car feels like it could eat continents.

We don't have a direct rival for the D3 on the fleet, but I recently tried our Audi TT TDI and the Alpina compares favourably with Ingolstadt's oil-burner. The TT is a little more agile, thanks to its shorter wheelbase

## 'Despite being a different kind of Alpina, the D3 is still effortlessly rapid and comfortable'

and permanent four-wheel drive, but the D3 feels more balanced, and while its engine is perhaps a touch off the Audi's in smoothness, its considerable torque advantage is clearly evident in the mid-range. Which takes us back to BMW's baffling decision to restrict the unit to the 1-series.

Gripes were hard to come by, but while we can vouch for the claimed top speed, the fuel economy refused to budge much beyond 44mpg. That seems a strange complaint,

particularly when the range was so impressive, but we were still left a little frustrated that it wasn't closer to 50mpg. That said, with maximum torque produced between 2000rpm and 2500rpm, and a steady queue of enthusiastic drivers keen to enjoy the D3's twin-turbo shove, perhaps it was unrealistic to expect it to match the claimed figures to the last digit. Owners have contacted us to raise similar issues, mind.

At least reliability wasn't an issue in the D3's short spell with us. No rattles appeared (beyond the occasional whine from the air vents), and the alloys remained unkerbed. The only damage, in fact, was a small bonnet dent caused by the conker-bombing horse chestnut trees in our car park. We didn't suffer the sting of tyre replacement, mind; that might have negated some of the D3's bragging rights over runflat-shod 3-series.

What faults this car does have – limited rear head room, for example – are inherited from the BMW anyway. Otherwise, it wants for little. Well, a bigger boot with a wider aperture would be welcome.

We might have found a solution, though. Alpina, you see, hasn't wasted any time in adding saloon and estate versions of the D3, so we've decided to swap the coupé for a Touring.

Our Sapphire Black Touring is in essentially the same spec as the coupé – so we'll continue to live without toys and change gear ourselves. And all the while, we can test an office theory that greater practicality could make the D3 Touring one of the best real-world cars on the market.

The biggest flaw that I can find in this plan is that I will not be the new arrival's custodian. Photographer Stan Papior is the lucky man. And I mean lucky.

JOHN MCILROY



Cabin is relatively spartan, but it keeps the price competitive