

Style Council...

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"Nice solution, difficult problem."

Alpina seem to get their styling just right, on every model. How? Just who is the maverick stylist at Alpina? Read on to find out...

Quite a number of BMW models over the past eight years penned by Chris Bangle have been panned for their awkward styling (some would call them downright ugly), with their unusual mix of concave and convex curves Bangle dubbed 'flame surfacing', yet Alpina consistently seem to be able to make a silk purse from a sow's ear, as their range of models have proven over the same period. So just how do Alpina get the styling right on their cars?

A quick call was made to good friend and Alpina Sales Director Kris Odwarka at the Alpina Headquarters in Germany. Kris is passionate about how the Alpina model range is perceived by the public, so my first question was an obvious one; who is the stylist responsible for the current range of Alpina models? The answer that came back took me by surprise – Alpina don't have a stylist as such! BMW spend hundreds of millions of euros on funding their styling department, scouring the world for the best available talent. Even so, they get it so wrong on quite a few occasions, yet the motoring cognoscenti seem to agree that Alpinas look 'right', even though they utilise the same BMW model 'as a starter for ten'.

Kris went on to explain: "You know, I'd love to have you over for an in-depth Alpina design story, but you'd leave a bit disappointed..."

We don't have any stylists on staff (though we sometimes ask for outside help for thought-starters). It's mostly just a group of our excellent engineers, driven by "form-follows-function". They come up with a few suggestions after having had a talk with us in Sales & Marketing, and we discuss the best way forward.

Once we've argued over the electronic versions, we then make parts of wheels or spoilers using a 3-D copy machine, one that uses a mixture of sand/paper/water/glue, and creates layer upon wafer-thin layer, so that we get a 3-D reproduction of the CAD/CAM design.

Then we argue some more, and make prototypes. Then we argue some more, then wind-tunnel test, looking for lift reduction, Cd reduction, airflow to radiators/ rear differentials/oil coolers/transmission coolers, into & out of the brakes.

We usually end up with two-three possible ways to go. Once that's all done, we're allowed to "allow good taste to make the final decision" as Burkhard Bovensiepen would say. It really

comes down to a final, knock-down/drag-out, with all members of Engineering and Sales & Marketing (and the three Bovensiepens) involved there.

We argue about what will sell better in what market around the world, and in what colour, and in what guise. Then the real wrangling begins, as if it weren't enough already: We argue about what is truly ALPINA - not just today, but ten/twenty years from now.

- Does this new front spoiler theme on the face-lift E90/91 still communicate ALPINA the way we want it to?
- Is it modern enough? Will it stand the test of time?
- Is it too modern, will it scare away current German/UK/Japanese clientele?
- Will it leave North American/Eastern European/Middle East customers flat?
- How will it look in the different colours that are most common?
- Does the new front spoiler on the B7 communicate ALPINA in the manner it should for being twice the price of a B3?
- Will it communicate ALPINA in a way that

the owner of the B7 will accept, and which is very different from the B3 driver?

- Does the B7, with its outward appearance, act as a flagship? Can we see the carriage communicated in a less formal way in the B3/D3?
- For the different clientele that the E90/E91 v E92/E93 represent, does the outward appearance differ enough?
- Is it still ALPINA? Does it fit the nature of the automobile variant?
- How does it affect lift for the very different aero characteristics of the E90-E93? Evenly? Under braking/acceleration? Or in a long Autobahn corner?

This process often takes over a year... The clear message is that we arrive at a single design through the pull-and-tug of many, many people who live, breathe and love ALPINA. There isn't any one person where you could say, "It's his brain-child." I think that kinds of adds to the charm...

It could probably be a bit less painful, though: it took us a few months and multiple rounds to decide the position/size/angle/



- 1) This side shot of the B7 shows how the awkward styling crease at the rear c-pillar flows seamlessly into the rear spoiler
- 2) The E63/64 6 Series is another Bangle design that has had mixed reviews – with the addition of the ubiquitous Alpina front spoiler and 20" Dynamic wheels, this B6S Convertible looks the part
- 3) This rear shot of the E63 B6S shows how Alpina have again cleverly added a rear spoiler to the boot of the 6er to remove some of the "awkwardness" from the boot area. The addition of four tailpipes and the Dynamic wheels makes the B6S look mean and moody
- 4) Alpina's styling tweaks to the E90/91/92/93 are spot on and make the D and B models look very desirable. Here we have an E92 B3 Bi-Turbo
- 5) In safe hands - Alpina have rarely got it wrong – check out the stunning E24 B7 turbo
- 6) The Alpina styling treatment has worked equally as well on the E60 B5S
- 7) The B7 Biturbo looks really mean and aggressive when viewed from the rear – check out those quad tailpipes and new 21" Classic wheels, almost the size of a jet engine turbine!!
- 8) Aaargh! – Why did BMW's board sign off the E65 for production? Bangle's bustle boot found few friends in the automotive world...
- 9) Stung by the criticism the E65 7 Series received, BMW went ultra conservative with the new F01/F02 models and then received even more criticism for being too conservative! Thankfully, Alpina have given the 7er an injection of oomph with the styling of their B7 Biturbo

Main Image - Alpina pulled off a masterstroke with the design of the rear spoiler for the E65, which helps that awkward angle at the bottom of the c-pillar to fuse effortlessly into the lines of the said spoiler