

My review: 2013 BMW 328i xDrive | The Grumpy Car Guy Blog



It's become a bit of a thing to pit the previous-generation (E90) BMW 3-series against the current model (F30) and declare one or the other the better car, and certainly it's hard to find a review of a 2013 3-series that doesn't raise the question of whether or not BMW lost its way with this version.

If that sounds too familiar, this is your lucky day. I haven't driven an E90 in a while and wouldn't feel right making any direct comparisons with one vs. the brand new F30 328i xDrive I found myself in possession of recently. So much for edginess!

For 2013, the 328i xDrive was available in several trims, including Luxury Line, Sport Line, and Classic Line. My ride was the latter, and in this case, "Classic" is a BMW euphemism for "basic."

Essentially, for \$39,990 (the Classic Line offers the same mechanicals as the other trims, including the 241-horsepower 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder engine, eight-speed automatic and xDrive AWD system, but with a stripped-down level of standard equipment and a shorter options list.



Fortunately, it would take a real BMW expert to spot the differences on the Classic Line that show the world you popped for the discount model. Wheels are 17-inchers instead of 18s. Headlights are halogen and, unfortunately, seemed surprisingly weak—if you want BMW’s famous “angel eye” bi-xenon lighting, you’ll need to add the Lighting Package for \$1,200.

No sunroof on this model either—that’ll be \$1,850 for the Premium Package, please. For that sum, you also get a folding rear seat and burl walnut interior trim. Surprisingly, no leather option is available at any price, with vinyl leatherette being your only choice for covering the seats. Other add-ons include navigation (\$2,000), Sirius satellite radio (\$450), BMW Assist telematics (\$850) and a heated steering wheel (\$250).

Interior:

Inside, the instruments feature BMW’s good old fuel economy gauge, although in the Classic Line it’s the old-style analog needle instead of the digital display you get in other models. The iDrive display sits above the middle of the dash like a miniature movie screen that looks like it should retract into the dash when not in use, but doesn’t. The iDrive menus, control knob and buttons aren’t much trouble to figure out and the display can be turned off if it distracts.



Oddly, BMW chose to include keyless push-button start but not keyless entry (Comfort Access, in BMW-speak), so you'll need to unlock the car with the fob as you approach but can then put it back in your pocket to start the engine. Comfort Access isn't even on the options list, so you're stuck with this weird key situation.

Despite the vinyl seats, the interior looks fairly upmarket and was a pleasant place to spend time in. I'm not a fan of interior wood trim and on this car the walnut dashboard accents were badly scratched in some places, but on the whole there's little here that belies the Classic Line's lower price point.

Driving impressions:

It's been beaten to death, but I have to mention it anyway—there's no fooling anyone that this engine is anything but a direct-injected four-cylinder. It feels like a four and sounds like a four. I like a sporty car to have some semblance of an interesting exhaust note, but this BMW had nothing to offer except a brief bark on initial startup. Seriously, the 1.6-litre turbo four with stock exhaust on my personal MINI Cooper S sounds much better than this thing. Pity.



What about the famous 3-series steering? Is this one worthy of the banner? Well, yes and no. The good: It's accurate. You can place this car anywhere you want on a corner, with confidence. I had a blast pushing it through some tight curves on my favourite local testing road. On the other hand, the bad is that steering feel is oddly light. It really needs more heft. Using the console button to put the car into sport mode did not tighten things up at the wheel, unfortunately, as it does on my MINI.

Brakes are strong, and the ride is comfortable and well-controlled. The car generally felt Germanically solid, although a couple of interior rattles made themselves heard on rougher surfaces. The sole jarring note is the auto start/stop system: the engine smoothly cuts out at a stop, but take your foot off the brake to move off again and it fires up with an abrupt shake. No smooth transition there. Fortunately, the system can be disabled, but if you choose to live with it, the 328i xDrive automatic is rated by Transport Canada at 9.1/6.2 L/100 km city/highway fuel economy.

The bottom line:

The BMW 328i xDrive Classic Line is a competent car with a nice feel, ride and, most importantly, encouraging handling—assuming you can deal with the overboosted steering. Although this vehicle was the bottom rung in the 3-series lineup at the time (now replaced by the 320i) it offers precious few reminders of your thriftiness out of the

box and allows you to add back in some of those forsaken luxuries by checking the right option boxes.

Would I buy one? No—it's just not enough of a driver's car to suit me. This trim seems designed for those who want the basic goodness of a BMW but not much more. Fortunately, for those of us who want more behind-the-wheel excitement from the vehicle (but don't have the scratch to step up to the 335i and its twin-turbo six) the 328i's Sport Line trim beckons. Now how to wrangle a drive in one of those... ?