



2011 BMW 535i

By Steve Schutz, MD

The BMW 5-series has finally “arrived.” It took six generations dating back to the landmark 1975 530i, but the “5” is now in the place where BMW has always wanted it: the go-to luxury sedan for customers who have achieved a significant milestone in their lives. There are as many milestones as there are people, of course; but I think in terms of the accountant who just made partner, or a surgeon who just paid off her student loans.



This is a change for the 5-series. When the first one launched in the U.S. thirty five years ago, it was an alternative to the “it” cars of the time, such as the Cadillac Sedan de Ville, Lincoln Versailles (remember that one?), Mercedes 450 SEL, and the like. The 5-series was for successful people who were also enthusiasts. As it has evolved, the 5-series has gradually become more mainstream, and the all-new 2011 model is the most mainstream yet.

It’s certainly bigger than it was. The last 535i was 191 inches long with a 114-inch wheelbase, while the new one is 193.1 inches long with a 117-inch wheelbase. That expansion gets you more passenger space as well as a bigger trunk. But at 4050 pounds, the new model is also 9 percent heavier than it used to be. My sense after a

week in the 535i is that its cabin feels a lot like the last generation 7-series, size wise.

The 535i’s interior is also more luxurious, as you’d expect. The materials look and feel rich—a lot like the 7-series, actually—and the front and rear seats are very comfortable. Thank you BMW.

There’s more high tech, too, and BMW’s unpopular iDrive system has been improved (again). I’ve experienced most iterations of the iDrive since its debut almost ten years ago, and I’ve applauded every improvement along the way. The latest version with six buttons around the central knob, and a larger, more attractive screen is my favorite. It now enhances the driving experience.

Ah—the driving experience, what BMWs have always been about. The adjective “refined” describes the experience of driving all BMWs, and

the new 5-series is certainly that.

But it’s less athletic than it was, like we all are if we put on some weight.

The exterior design is more mainstream than it used to be, too. Gone are the sharp edges and strange cut lines of the last 5-series that so many of the BMW faithful found irritating; they’re now replaced by reassuring curves and smooth contours. It’s an attractive look that quietly reflects a sense of life success.

The 2011 BMW 5 Series sedan can be ordered with three different engines that correspond to three trim levels: 528i, 535i and 550i. The 535i and 550i are also offered with “xDrive” all-wheel-drive, which I

doubt will be popular in South Texas.

The 528i comes with a 3.0-liter straight-six that's rated at 240 HP; the 535i comes with a 300 HP turbocharged variant of that same engine; and the 550i has a 400 HP turbocharged 4.4-liter V8. The 528i, 535i xDrive, and 550i xDrive only come with an automatic transmission, while the 535i and 550i are available with BMW's delicious six-speed manual gearbox.

In published testing, the 528i earns fuel economy figures of 22 MPG city/32 highway; the 535i gets 20 MPG city/25 highway; and the 550i gets 17 MPG city/25 highway. All-wheel-drive versions of the 535i and 550i drop by about 1 MPG in each category. The 535i accelerates from zero-to-sixty MPH in just under six seconds. It's fast.

Standard on the 528i are 17-inch wheels, rain-sensing wipers, sun-roof, heated side mirrors, eight-way power front seats, dual-zone climate control, power tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel, iDrive, Bluetooth, and a 12-speaker CD audio system with HD radio.

Ordering the 535i gets you all of the above plus nicer 18-inch wheels and adaptive HID headlights. The 550i adds leather upholstery, upgraded front seats, parking sensors, auto-dimming mirrors,

interior ambience lighting, and Sat-Nav with voice control and real-time traffic. All of these features are optional on the 528i and 535i.

Many other options, including the popular Sport Package, active cruise control, exterior cameras all around, et. al., are available but are too numerous to mention here. Suffice it to say, your 2011 5-series can be outfitted almost as thoroughly as a loaded 750i.

Yes, the new 5-series has arrived, but it's lost some athleticism as it gained luxury and mainstream appeal. Professionals who have reached a significant milestone should consider the BMW 5-series along with the Mercedes E-class and Lexus GS; they will be happy with any of the three. True enthusiasts may prefer the sportier BMW 3-series instead. ⚙️

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