

2011 BMW ALPINA B7

By Steve Schutz, MD

Despite having a much smaller population in the United States, Germany remains the world's largest market for BMWs. That means that owners of BMW's flagship 7-series see a lot of cars just like theirs driving around; so if you own a 7-series BMW in Germany and want to stand out, it must be a special car. Enter the BMW Alpina B7, a car that stands out both when you look at it and when you drive it. It's a special

All standard 7-series sedans have a very nice interior, but Alpina makes sure B7 customers get a little extra. Like blue-illuminated door sill plates, a special hand-stitched and heated leather steering wheel, unique piano black or burl-walnut trim, and very attractive Alpina-specific gauges.

While a distinctive exterior design and sumptuous cabin are fine



(and expected), potential buyers will be most interested in how the B7 drives. The answer is very well indeed. That should surprise no one since the standard BMW 7-series drives extremely well, but the B7 takes athletic driving to another level. I drove the B7 on the interstate, over twisty mountain roads, and through town and it never put a foot wrong. The

car. Will it succeed in the United States where even a standard 7 series BMW is a big deal? Who knows, but that hardly matters since BMW only plans to bring over 500 B7s in 2011.

Thanks to some distinctive exterior paint colors along with super-cool 21-inch alloy wheels, all B7 sedans will get noticed on the road. Still, except for those tasty touches and some additional bodywork modifications, the B7 is fundamentally a 7-series BMW, which is to say—an alpha car. Alpha sedans, such as the Mercedes S class, Lexus LS 460, and Jaguar XJ (to name just three) are power cars that prompt you to move over when you see them in your rear view mirror. Having an alpha car is good; and having a B7 is even better.

For non-BMW fans, Alpina is an independent company that's been closely associated with BMW for many years. Alpina's modus operandi is to take standard BMWs and tune them so they drive even better than stock. Then they add exterior and interior modifications to make their cars even more visually distinctive. How distinctive? Thirty years later, I still fondly remember staring at numerous Alpina 3-series BMWs from the late 1970s and early 1980s with their cool bodywork and twenty-spoke wheels. (For the record, the B7's wheels also have 20 spokes).



750Li, as readers of my review last year will recall, does well on the highway and in town, but struggles a bit through the twisties. Not so with the B7, a car that seems to defy the

laws of physics. Yes it's heavy—about 4600 pounds to be exact—but the B7 never tilts perceptibly during cornering, and every steering response is immediate and drama-free, even at speed. No, it's not like driving an M3; but it's noticeably better than the 750Li.

Lots of the credit for the B7's driving prowess goes to the engine. A 500-HP turbocharged beast, Alpina's massaged BMW V8 carries the big sedan from zero to OMG! MPG in about two seconds, and is so fast I was never brave enough to floor it. Published figures say zero to sixty MPH takes 4.5 seconds, which is M5 territory, and I do not doubt it.

To get to 500 HP, the 4.4-liter BMW V-8 engine gets bigger turbochargers, reinforced cylinder heads, higher performance pistons, and special Alpina software. The maximum boost pressure is raised to 14.5 psi, which is a lot. But it's not too much or BMW wouldn't give it



Standard features include the aforementioned 21-inch wheels, HID headlights, keyless ignition/entry, front and rear parking sensors, auto-dimming mirrors, four-zone automatic climate control, heated and cooled front seats, heated rear seats, heads-up display, Sat Nav with real-time traffic and voice activation, Bluetooth, and a fantastic 10-speaker audio system with six-CD/DVD changer, 12GB hard drive, satellite radio, and iPod/USB jacks.

An optional camera package adds Infiniti-like integrated rear, side and front camera views, which significantly help parking. (If you haven't seen this yet, you should. It's really something.) A 'driver assistance' package includes automatic high beams and a lane-departure warning system with blind-spot detection.



the same warranty as it gives the 750i (which BMW does). Thank you, Alpina, for providing an additional radiator, engine-oil and transmission-oil

coolers, a larger engine fan, and bigger intercoolers with wider water lines to deal with the extra heat generated by all that power.

The Alpina B7 package can be had with pretty much any V8 7-series, including the short- and long-wheelbase versions, as well as those with rear- or all-wheel drive, which BMW now calls xDrive.

The BMW 750Li is already an alpha car without the 500-HP engine and extra exterior and interior goodies you get with the B7.

But BMW decided to offer the uber-alpha B7 in this country anyway, and I applaud them for it. Why should the Germans have all the fun?



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