

# Bigger Bavarian – the new BMW 3 Series

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When Audi launched the A4L back in 2008 they struck a chord with the Chinese car buying public that wanted a mid-range luxury car with more space. Last year the Audi A4L sold 100,340 against 46,745 for the BMW 3 Series. But the new BMW 3 Series is fighting back and has the A4L squarely in its sights.

The new BMW 3 Series has an added 110mm on the wheelbase and overall length of the standard car. This translates into an extra 90mm of knee room for passengers in the back and makes it much larger than the old 3 Series, but still not quite as long as the A4L.

Whereas the Audi A4L is quite a dull car to drive, the new 3 Series shows a different pedigree from the moment you sit in the driver's seat: front seats are low mounted as in a sport's car. We drove a Sport Line trimmed 328Li. Both the 320Li and 328Li are powered by a two-litre turbo engine – the 335Li features a six cylinder three litre unit. Once on the move we slipped the eight speed automatic gearbox into sports mode and were greeted with a raspy exhaust note. With the 328Li an extra 45kW of power are coaxed out of the engine compared to the unit fitted in the 320Li.

Handling, as can be expected, is good



with near instant response from the engine and seamless gear changes. Reassuringly the brakes are also more than capable of bringing all the power into check within a short stopping distance.

Adding to the driver centred feel of the vehicle is a head-up display showing the current speed and information such as the route. BMW's iDrive can be changed into English and operates as an entertainment centre using the CD/DVD and 20GB internal hard disk. One surprising omission on our test car was a rear-view camera – although reversing sensors were fitted. Mostly the iDrive is operated via controls near the gear stick although some functions are controllable via steering mounted controls.

There is an iPhone cradle and charger fitted in the storage space below the central arm rest. USB devices can also be connected. Buyers have a choice of various leathers and internal colours to personalise their car.

In the rear, legroom is good but taller passengers may have problems with headroom. The front passenger seat can be moved electrically from the rear and in very much a nod to local needs there are ash-trays fitted in the rear doors! Boot space is capacious and there are tie down points for large items along with split folding of the rear seats.

BMW's Efficient Dynamics is fitted across the stretched 3 Series range. This reduces fuel consumption by cutting the engine when stationary, and uses brake-



energy regeneration to help power the electrical systems.

Whereas the Audi A4L is the consummate cruiser the long-wheel-base BMW 3 Series is a far sportier beast. With the wheelbase plug the 3 Series can now be a real upmarket alternative to mainstream mid-range cars and give rear passengers the space they need. Prices range from RMB 326,500 for the baseline 320Li six-speed manual – the only manual offered – to RMB 598,000 for the top of the range 335Li.

## Italian For Four: The new Maserati Quattroporte V6

G. ROLLINS

It's a hard-fought battle – to claim the title of best four-door premium Gran Turismo on the market.

The competition is vigorous; the Mercedes S-Class, Audi A8, BMW 7-Series, and the mighty Porsche Panamera. But, for a growing number of admirers, the Maserati Quattroporte is the touring car of the moment. Adding to that luster is the arrival of a new variant – with a V6 power unit.

Make no mistake; early reports indicate that this will be no ordinary V6 engine. With the same bore and combustion chamber design, the same valve-control technology, the same twin turbocharging approach and direct injection-ignition system as the big brother V8, we can expect

a six-cylinder with real grunt. Genuine power and torque with an epic exhaust noise to boot.

This performance should come as no surprise. All engines in the Quattroporte range are designed by Maserati Powertrain and assembled by Ferrari in Maranello.

The specifications that have been released so far indicate a tremendously powerful driving experience for a V6 engine. We can expect 550 Nm of peak torque available between 1,750 rpm and 5,000 rpm. While the specific power output of the V6 will be slightly lower than the V8, specific torque will be higher than the larger engine, offering 183 Nm per liter.

If you have the spare Renminbi, the

Quattroporte GTS V8 will still be the top of the range, with a 3.8 litre twin-turbocharged eight-cylinder engine hammering to 100 km/h in 4.7 seconds and a top speed of 307km/h. But the new V6 variants will be no slouch. Just look at the figures: The 3.0 liter six-cylinder alternative will pump out 301 kW of power from beneath that elegantly curved bonnet, reaching 100 km/h in 5.1 seconds and a top speed of 285 km/h. Should be sufficient for most...

The Italian craftsmanship also makes an appearance on the inside. While the final specifications have not been released, some features of the V6 range include an 8.4-inch Maserati Touch Control screen, reversing camera, leather trim, dual-zone climate control, sunroof, and power side- and rear blinds. With Alcantara roof-lining plus a spine-tingling 1,280 Watt Bowers & Wilkins audio, all as extra options for the V6 range, this will be a spacious sports car for the connoisseurs among us.

Returning to the outside, the only clear differences externally are four exhaust pipes, which are now rounded; instead of trapezoidal in shape, while wheel sizes are reportedly optional and available in 19 to 21 inch alloy packages. To complete with this external poetry, the Quattroporte V6 will continue to be built at the former Bertone factory in Turin.

Coming back to the sound of a Maserati Quattroporte. We can't ignore this feature – it's a crucial element of this incredible car – the exhaust system that we mentioned

earlier is legendary. Pneumatic valves control this feature and in the default "Normal" mode the bypass valves are closed until 4,200 rpm to offer a discreet engine sound. However when in "Sport" mode, the Quattroporte opens the bypass valves and emits an entrancing engine noise as the car accelerates. Throttle response is more sudden and gear shifts clearly more acute. It all combines to create a feature so theatrically perfectly and such an epic Maserati thrill that it cannot be ignored.

Worried about fuel consumption and the environment? The console offers a button labeled "I.C.E." – the official acronym for "Increased Control and Efficiency." The button reduces fuel consumption, CO2 emissions and engine noise. Some would say that it's a button useful as windscreen wipers on a submarine – but this level of environmental concern is inevitable in all great premium cars these days.

So there you have it, the new V6 variant of one of the greatest Gran Turismo sports cars on the market today. Extra rear-seat space for passengers and generous leg and shoulder room has been described as "liberal". Knowing the Chinese market and its need for all-round comfort, these are the features designed for the local consumers.

We have a sports car with space and design, plus an engine that is undeniable a sports car thoroughbred. It's a combination that has already proven surprisingly successful in Europe. But only time will tell, what results we can expect in China.

