



www.autodatasolutions.com

2009 BMW 1 Series New BMW 128i coupes and Convertibles.

Overview

When it arrived here in mid-2008, the BMW 1 Series signaled the Bavarian automaker's serious intent to deliver BMW-grade driving excitement in a smaller, less costly package. As if to show just how serious, initially only one model was available: the high-performance BMW 135i Coupe, with 300 twin-turbocharged horsepower.

For 2009 BMW has expanded the series, adding the BMW 128i, with 230 horsepower and nearly all of the same amenities, for \$6450 less. Better still, you can now buy beautifully made, high-quality convertible-top versions of both models.

The 1 Series is almost seven inches shorter overall than the next car up in the BMW line, the popular 3 Series. The 1 Series wheelbase is four inches shorter than that of the 3 Series, and it's a significant 2.7 inches narrower in width. The 1 Series is meant to be a serious, sporty competitor to all the front-wheel-drive Japanese, Korean, and domestic cars in the entry luxury coupe class. BMW brings its highly developed rear-wheel-drive platform to the fight.

In many ways, the 1 Series is nothing more or less than a scaled-down coupe version of the 3 Series two-door coupe, with similar looks, similar equipment and similar performance and handling because it uses many of the same components and systems, including the big twin-turbocharged engine that was introduced last year in the 335i, so the 135i is a smaller, lighter package with the same engine for about \$6300 less starting money.

Model Lineup

For 2009, the BMW 1 Series lineup has expanded to four models: the 230-horsepower 128i and the 300-horsepower 135i, each available as a coupe or a convertible. All are powered by 3.0-liter inline-6 engines driving the rear wheels through a standard six-speed manual or optional (\$1,325) six-speed automatic transmission.

The BMW 128i Coupe (\$29,400) comes with automatic climate control; premium AM/FM/CD audio with auxiliary input jack; a leather-wrapped, multi-function steering wheel; leatherette upholstery; cruise control; power glass sunroof; high-gloss black interior trim; rain-sensing automatic headlights; fog lights; and 205/55HR16 all-season tires on 16-inch alloy wheels.

The BMW 135i Coupe (\$35,850) adds, in addition to its twin-turbocharged engine, a firmer sport suspension and high-performance brakes; xenon headlights with adaptive light control; retractable headlight washers; Gray Poplar wood interior trim; and 215/40YR18 front tires leading 245/35YR18 rears, both of course on 18-inch alloy rims.

The BMW 128i Convertible (\$34,000) and 135i Convertible (\$40,150) are equipped similarly to their coupe counterparts, except that the 135i soft top rolls on less radical 205/50HR17 rubber front and rear. Both come with a fully automatic fabric folding top.

A Sport Package (\$1,300) for the 128i models includes sport suspension, sport seats, M-style steering wheel, Shadowline trim, and wider tires on 17-inch rims. You can also add the seats, steering wheel, and trim to the 135i (\$1,100), which already comes with the sport suspension and 18-inch wheels.

Options include leather upholstery (\$1,450), heated front seats (\$500), rear park distance control (\$350), navigation (\$2,100), BMW Assist (\$750), Sirius satellite radio (\$595), HD radio (\$350), iPod/USB adapter (\$400), Smartphone integration (\$150), and xenon headlights (\$900). Wood trim is available on the 128i (\$500) and can be omitted from the 135i (for no charge). The 135i Coupe and Convertible offer variable-ratio Active Steering (\$1,550) and, new for 2009, a heated steering wheel (\$150). Both convertibles offer a rear-seat ski bag that loads through the trunk (\$175). Various Cold Weather packages (\$600-900) bundle some of the above-listed equipment, while Premium Packages (\$3,400-3,700) combine leather upholstery with power memory seats and other amenities.

Safety features that come standard on the 1 Series include frontal airbags, seat-mounted side-impact airbags, side curtain airbags (coupe only), ABS, electronic stability control, traction control, cornering brake control, and launch control for getting started on slippery surfaces. The brake lights include a panic-braking mode that lights up the entire lens extra bright whenever the brake pedal is stomped hard. A tire-pressure monitor is standard. The 135i comes with run-flat tires.

Walkaround

The best thing about the exterior appearance of the BMW 1 Series is that this time around, it looks like a real car, unlike the old 318ti which was a cheapened, cut-off version of the 3 Series that attracted a small cult following but never sold well in the U.S.



The 1 Series proportions were more carefully considered and while it is definitely short in the poop compared to the larger 3 Series, it looks good that way, thanks to the designers. It doesn't look cheap or cut off or bandaged. Every major part of the car, the nose, the bodyside, the roof and the rear end, blends beautifully with the rest of the car to make a shorter, narrower version of the 3 Series with a different and special roofline.

We're particularly fond of the M Aerodynamics Package made standard on the 135i (but not the 128i), including the huge air intakes below the bumper, necessary for cooling the turbocharger intake air. The 128i has a cleaner, albeit more conventional, full-width opening below the bumper, divided into three parts by two angled struts. The outboard sections are then sub-divided horizontally, with a fog light at the top and a small grille underneath. The bottom edge of the opening turns up at the ends, smile-like.

At the rear, the 128i dispenses with the 135i's prominent spoiler, in favor of a more gentle lip integrated into the trunk lid. And the 128i's rear bumper is entirely body-color, lacking the black-out panel seen on the 135i. Drag coefficient actually improves, from 0.33 to 0.31 Cd.

Put the top down on the new convertible models, and the flared shoulder line that's shared with the coupes seems to form a single surface that surrounds the interior, like the deck of a small boat. For both convertible models, drag coefficient increases slightly to 0.34.

Interior Features

Anyone familiar with the interior layout of the current 3 Series would be hard pressed to tell the difference between the BMW 135i and the much larger, more expensive 335i. Just about everything inside is in the same location and looks and operates the same way.

We found the front bucket seats very comfortable and supportive, with big side bolsters. The steering wheel tilts and telescopes, helping drivers of different shapes and sizes to find the ideal driving position.

Order the optional navigation system and you get BMW's iDrive, which integrates navigation, entertainment, telephone, and other controls via a pop-up screen on the top of the dash and a mouse-like knob on the console. BMW claims the fourth-generation system, which the 1 Series adopts for 2009, is more natural and intuitive in operation than past versions have been.

All 1 Series coupes come with a 60/40 split folding rear seat than can provide almost triple the trunk room of 10 cubic feet. A storage package for the trunk area includes some tie-downs and straps and a 12-volt power point for external accessories.

The convertibles feature a soft top that can be raised or lowered in 22 seconds, even while driving at speeds up to 25 mph, so you don't need to worry whether that stoplight will be long enough to finish the roof operation. The soft top takes up less trunk space than a convertible hard top would, which is partly why the design uses a soft top. Still, cargo room shrinks to just 8 cubic feet.

Interior room suffers a bit, too, although hardly enough for a real convertible enthusiast to notice. Front leg room is reduced by a quarter inch, and head room by three-quarters of an inch. The losses in rear seat room are a bit more consequential, where shoulder room contracts by nearly a foot. Leg room is reduced by three-quarters of an inch, and head room by little more than a hair (0.1 inch).

The optional leather upholstery for the convertible incorporates what BMW calls Sun Reflective Technology, a special pigment which reflects both heat and ultraviolet rays. BMW claims this technology can keep the surface of the seats 20 degrees F cooler than conventional leather under the same sun, while also helping the hides last longer. Additionally, the convertibles' automatic climate control system adds a top-down mode that reacts less to interior temperature and more to the exterior climate and sunlight.

Driving Impressions

Driving a 300-hp, 3400-pound rear-drive coupe built on a short-wheelbase chassis adds up to a great deal of driving enjoyment, especially when the engine's torque curve is absolutely flat from 1300 to 5000 rpm and the engine redlines at 7000 rpm.



The 135i's 24-valve inline-6 packs two turbochargers and makes more than 100 hp per liter, which is considered engineering magic. BMW says a manual-shift 135i will accelerate from rest to 60 mph in a mere 5.1 seconds, which is not something that most cars in this projected price category can do. Top speed is electronically limited to 130 mph (or 149 mph with the Sport Package). EPA estimates are 17 mpg city/25mpg highway with the manual transmission; and 18/25 with the automatic.

Because the BMW 135i is essentially a scaled-down 335i, its ride, steering, and handling carry the same exemplary qualities as the larger car. Its smaller front steering tires are matched to the job of pointing the car while the fatter rear tires lay the power down in wonderfully linear fashion. The car's weight is distributed 52/48 on the front and rear tires.

The 135i's brakes use massive six-piston calipers at the front and twin-piston calipers at the rear, with 13.3-inch front discs and 12.75-inch rear discs and a built-in brake drying and anti-fade feature.

We found the steering, cornering, and braking performance of the BMW 135i to be exemplary, perfectly matched to the huge acceleration power of the engine.

We haven't driven the 128i, but we expect it will also deliver a good measure of driving enjoyment. Its engine is very slightly larger (2996 cc vs. 2979 for the 135i) but breathes at atmospheric pressure without benefit of turbocharging. It does feature the same Valvetronic valvetrain management and aluminum/magnesium construction as the 135i unit. It develops 230 horsepower and 200 pound-feet of torque which, in the slightly lighter, 3250-pound 128i, should still get your attention when you put the pedal to the floor. BMW lists a 0-60 mph time of 6.1 seconds, which is quite sprightly and just a second slower than the 135i, with the same electronically limited top speed.

Fuel economy is significantly better in the 128i, with EPA ratings of 18 mpg city/28 mpg highway with the manual transmission. (Again, the automatic picks up 1 additional mpg in the city.)

The standard suspension in the 128i is softer than in the 135i, but weight distribution is a marginally better 51/49. Brakes are 11.8-inch vented discs all around, but again, that should be more than adequate for the 128i's more modest; no, make that less extravagant performance.

Electronic driving aids abound in the 1 Series, including antilock brakes with electronic brake-force distribution and cornering brake control, dynamic traction control, dynamic stability

control, and a switch that can disable the DSC system for track days or generally more involving driving through the woods. That's ABS with EBD, CBC, DSC and traction control, for those who prefer acronyms.

Summary

The BMW 1 Series cars have all the style, performance and features a driver could want in a compact package. It's built around one of the best chassis in the segment, and the only one with rear-wheel drive. The addition of two convertible models expands its appeal.



[Autodata Solutions](#), Inc. is an authorized distributor of [NewCarTestDrive Reviews](#).