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2011 BMW 5 Series

The sixth-generation of the BMW 5 Series goes on sale this summer. The all-new 2011 BMW 5 Series carries softer ends and more chiseled sides, reflecting recently updated 7 Series and Z4 BMWs while keeping the traditional kidney-shaped grilles and Hofmeister kink in the rear side window.

The new 5 Series is an inch longer and wider, fractionally lower than the outgoing version, but the wheelbase has been lengthened by more than three inches. This leaves a short trunk lid, longer hood, and results in a more substantial, closer-to-the-ground appearing car. Despite the longer wheelbase cabin space hasn't grown commensurately but the trunk is larger.

BMW rarely redesigns engines and cars together so we expect the North American 5 Series to offer a normally aspirated 3-liter six-cylinder of about 260 hp (528i or 530i), a 300-310 hp twin-turbo 3-liter six (535i), and a 400-hp twin-turbo V8 (550i). A diesel may be available, either a 185-hp four-cylinder or 245-265 hp 3-liter six. A six-speed manual gearbox will be standard on most, a new eight-speed automatic available; expect the line to expand with all-wheel drive available later and standard on the wagon.

Outright performance should mirror today's models with some capable of 0-60 in less than 5 seconds and diesels of 30 mpg; the new car will likely be heavier but extra gears are great equalizers. In terms of handling, ride and control BMW's own 3 Series was the bogey for nimbleness, and entirely new front suspension, updated rear suspension and available active controls of same should provide excellent ride quality. Active steering will again be offered, though BMW's standard steering ranks among the best.

The cabin will be pure Teutonic BMW with the center dash angled slightly toward the driver, an asymmetric center console and clarity of purpose. White-on-black instruments, deep amber digital displays and a substantial navigation screen keep the driver apprised of myriad information and allow tailoring of many specifics. Base cars will likely use cloth upholstery, albeit to a high standard of fit and finish, while leather will be default on higher models, along with woods and materials suitable for Scandinavian simplicity.

A full load of technology is on the palette too, with an alphabet's worth of active chassis and safety controls, variable cooling openings in the grilles, and existing bits such as the head-up display, latest-iteration (and much improved) iDrive, lane departure warning, park sensors, rear camera and night vision. New gadgets may include adaptive headlights with range control and auto high-beam assistant, surround view cameras, energy-recuperation drivetrain, and parallel-park assistant.

Be assured that between the driving experience and the electronic features you will never get bored in a 5 Series.

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