

# Load runner

Hot on the heels of the E90 saloon comes the new 3 Series Touring but is it still the lifestyle estate to be seen in?

Words: Bob Harper Photography: Dave Smith



With time being short on this International launch of the E91 3 Series Touring snapper Smith and myself have teamed up with the boys from *What Car?* for the day – they've got a 320d Touring while we're ensconced in a heavily optioned 325i with the new lightweight straight-six that we've not sampled before. While we'll get snaps of the Mystic blue petrol machine they'll photograph the grey diesel and through the course of the day we'll be able to swap between the cars to maximise wheel time in the two machines.

So far so good, but as we follow the 320d onto the Autobahn slip road I make a mental note to have a good look under the bonnet of the grey Touring that's rapidly leaving us for dead as we feed into the motorway. Two-litre four-pot diesel versus 2.5-litre straight-six petrol used to be a no-brainer; the petrol would surely win every time. Welcome to 2005 and the great motoring God of the 21st century – torque. It's the diesel's forte and as I wasn't expecting to dog it straight away the *What Car?* boys have caught me napping. Dropping down a couple of cogs in the slick six-speed manual box

restores order and as the revs rise towards the heady 7500rpm redline the 325i makes better headway, reeling in the 320d with ease. However, it'll take the 330i Touring that arrives later in the Autumn to really knock spots off the four-pot oil-burner, and even then the next generation 330d with its new lightweight 231bhp diesel unit will probably knock spots off it in terms of flexibility.

While the driving experience has always been high on the list of wish factors for 3 Series Touring buyers it's the added practicality, and some would argue better looks, of the lifestyle estate that's the



## SPECIFICATION – E91 3 SERIES TOURING

### 320i

**Engine** four-cylinder, 16-valve, Valvetronic  
**Capacity** 1995cc  
**Max Power** 150bhp (110kW) @ 6200rpm  
**Max Torque** 147 lb ft (200Nm) @ 3500rpm  
**Top Speed** 136mph (Auto: 133)  
**0-62mph** 9.4 seconds (Auto: 10.2)  
**50-75mph (4th gear)** 9.6 seconds  
**Economy** 37.2mpg (Auto: 34.9)  
**Emissions (CO2)** 182 g/km (Auto: 196)  
**Weight** 1505kg  
**Price (OTR)** TBC  
**On sale** Autumn 2005

### 320d

**Engine** four-cylinder, 16-valve, turbo diesel  
**Capacity** 1995cc  
**Max Power** 163bhp (120kW) @ 4000rpm  
**Max Torque** 251 lb ft (340Nm) @ 2000-2750rpm  
**Top Speed** 139mph (Auto: 136)  
**0-62mph** 8.6 seconds (Auto: 8.8)  
**50-75mph (4th gear)** 7.1 seconds  
**Economy** 47.9mpg (Auto: 40.9)  
**Emissions (CO2)** 158 g/km (Auto: 184)  
**Weight** 1580kg  
**Price (OTR)** £24,540 (ES), £25,570 (SE)  
**On sale** 17 September

### 325i

**Engine** six-cylinder, 24-valve, Valvetronic  
**Capacity** 2497cc  
**Max Power** 1218bhp (160kW) @ 6500rpm  
**Max Torque** 184 lb ft (250Nm) @ 2750-4250rpm  
**Top Speed** 152mph (Auto: 150)  
**0-62mph** 7.2 seconds (Auto: 7.9)  
**50-75mph (4th gear)** 7.9 seconds  
**Economy** 32.8mpg (Auto: 30.7)  
**Emissions (CO2)** 208 g/km (Auto: 222)  
**Weight** 1545kg  
**Price (OTR)** £26,340 (SE)  
**On sale** 17 September

### 330d

**Engine** six-cylinder, 24-valve, turbo diesel  
**Capacity** 2993cc  
**Max Power** 231bhp (170kW) @ 4000rpm  
**Max Torque** 369 lb ft (500Nm) @ 1750-3000rpm  
**Top Speed** 154mph (Auto: 153)  
**0-62mph** 6.8 seconds (Auto: 6.9)  
**50-75mph (4th gear)** 5.2 seconds  
**Economy** 42.2mpg (Auto: 37.2)  
**Emissions (CO2)** 179 g/km (Auto: 203)  
**Weight** 1675kg  
**Price (OTR)** TBC  
**On sale** Autumn 2005

### 330i

**Engine** six-cylinder, 24-valve, Valvetronic  
**Capacity** 2996cc  
**Max Power** 258bhp (190kW) @ 6600rpm  
**Max Torque** 221 lb ft (300Nm) @ 2500-4000rpm  
**Top Speed** 155mph (Auto: 155)  
**0-62mph** 6.0 seconds (Auto: 6.8)  
**50-75mph (4th gear)** 6.9 seconds  
**Economy** 31.7mpg (Auto: 30.4)  
**Emissions (CO2)** 214 g/km (Auto: 224)  
**Weight** 1605kg  
**Price (OTR)** TBC  
**On sale** Autumn 2005



clinging factor when buying. While the E46 Touring looked fantastic, especially with the optional Sport aerodynamic kit, it was always, how should I put it, a bit like a reverse of the Tardis. Top of the priority list for BMW then was to make the E91 Touring a more practical proposition and a wheelbase up by 35 millimetres has certainly increased rear legroom to an acceptable level, although the rear-drive layout will always rob some rear seat legroom. Having three adults in the back should no longer pose a

problem – I can now sit behind a six-foot driver and feel comfortable, something that just wasn't possible in the outgoing model.

Boot space wasn't a forte of the old model either and BMW has increased its lugging ability too. With the 60/40 rear seats in place there's 460 litres of luggage space (if you load up to the top of the rear seat backrest) which is up 25 litres over the old model, and if you fold down the rear seats there's now 40 litres more space than in the E46 at 1385





litres. That makes the 3 Series Touring significantly more commodious than an A4 Avant (especially with the seats down) and just about on a par with the Mercedes C Class Estate. However, to give you an idea how far these prestige lifestyle models fall down on load lugging abilities, a class-leader such as a Ford Mondeo has between 80 and 315 litres more space in its luggage compartment.

As you'd probably expect the Touring's overall dimensions have grown over the E46, but not by as

much as you'd expect. It's 4.2 centimetres longer, 7.8 wider and just under a centimetre taller than its predecessor, and it's that increased width that now makes the car a practical proposition for rear seat passengers. Despite its increase in size the Touring's body is said to be 25 per cent stiffer than the E46, and thanks to lightweight technologies it is 15 kilos lighter overall too.

Aesthetically, to my eyes, the Touring shape works better than the Saloon, with the slightly awkward

rear light clusters suiting the Touring body. Visually the strong crease that runs all the way from the front wheel arches to the rear light clusters gives it real presence on the road, and the only view that doesn't quite work as well as the E46 is the side profile. The rear bumper looks a trifle heavy, while the rear window behind the C pillar does appear to have shrunk slightly making the glass area look a little bit mean.

However, don't let that put you off as within the





**Storage options**



The Touring's luggage area offers nets and hooks by the lorry-load to keep everything from rolling around; clever under floor storage area might be a £160 option, but it's certainly worth having; load area not 100 per cent flat



boot area BMW has put a huge amount of thought into making the E91 a very practical proposition. There are storage nets and cubbys by the bucket load and enough 12-volt sockets to power a small semi detached property, but it's under the floor where most attention to detail has paid off. Thanks to the run flat tyres there's no spare and instead you get a very versatile storage area. Admittedly to make the most of it you'll have to tick the £160 Luggage Compartment Package, but for that you get a fold out box big enough for muddy wellies plus a plastic sheet that can be folded out to protect the rear bumper from being scratched when loading bulky

items. The bumper itself has a pretty low lip to ease the strain of loading and like the 5 Series Touring the E91 has a load cover that automatically pops up when you open the top half of the split tailgate which certainly makes loading easier if you've got your hands full, but it's a slight irritation that it doesn't pop itself back down when you close the tailgate. Another minor annoyance is that with the rear seats folded you don't get a completely flat load area, but it's small beer really for what is an excellent piece of overall design.

So it's bigger and cleverer than the E46, but all that will be a waste of effort if it doesn't do the

business on the road. Given how dynamically superior the Saloon is to the outgoing model it would be a surprise if the E91 didn't make a decent fist at being an Ultimate Driving Machine. In typical BMW fashion it doesn't disappoint.

As I mentioned earlier the 325i's straight-six might initially feel a little gutless compared to a diesel, but it's so smooth and sonorous that it's a real delight to explore the higher segment of the rev counter. It just goes on, and on and on with an absolutely unburstable feel to it. It's benchmark figures might not be that much better than the 320d's, but you can easily forget what a joy it is to extend a sweet





petrol unit. When driven in this fashion its economy isn't anything to write home about, but let's face it, there's not usually that much of an opportunity to drive like this, and driven at more sedate speeds and the thirst diminishes accordingly.

All the test cars that were assembled for the launch were equipped with 16-inch wheels and standard suspension, and on Germany's notoriously smooth blacktop we weren't going to learn a huge amount about the ride quality, but given that the E90 Saloon performs well at this discipline in the UK we don't doubt that the Touring should behave in the same manner.

It is on the firm side, but the flip side of the coin is pin-sharp turn in, especially in the 325i with its lighter front end. Both the diesel and the 325i feel supremely agile, taking abrupt direction changes in their stride while the meaty three-spoke steering wheel provides you with a tactile interface to receive messages about what's going on underneath you.

If the dreaded company car tax rules didn't come into the equation choosing between a 320d and the 325i would be a hard choice indeed. The diesel obviously isn't as refined or as melodious as the petrol, but in real world situations its instant urge in almost any ratio you care to pick does give it an

edge if you're feeling lazy or can't be bothered to put a lot of energy into your driving. As much as I enjoyed the 325i I think I'd opt for the 320d – perhaps I'm just getting old and practical!

The E91 hits the UK showrooms in mid September and to start with will be available as either the 320d (in ES and SE trims) or 325i (SE trim only). The 320i (four-cylinder), 330i and 330d variants will come on stream by mid-October and prices for these latter three models will be announced nearer the time. The 320d ES has an on the road price of £24,540, 320d SE at £25,570 and the 325i SE £26,340. Standard kit on all models will



include six-speed manual gearbox, air conditioning, Professional radio/CD, six airbags, front fog lamps, all round electric windows, OBC, body coloured exterior components DSC (DSC+ on six-cylinder models) and 16-inch wheels with run flat tyres. SE models gain auto air, fancier alloys (17-inchers on the 325i and above), multi-function steering wheel, rear PDC, cruise control and an extended interior light package. For those of us who remember the 'good' old days when a radio and an aerial was an option these seem like pretty generous levels of standard equipment, but there's still plenty to choose from on the options list, such as Active Steering (don't

bother), Active Cruise Control, Professional Navigation with iDrive controller and the very useful Luggage Compartment Package. Expected sales in the first full model year are 8500 units which will be about 1500 more than the E46 could muster in 2004, and you can virtually guarantee that over half of all those sales will be for the exceptionally talented 320d with the 320i taking approximately another 20 per cent. The new lightweight six-cylinder powered 325i and 330i might be excellent machines, but if the E46's performance in 2004 is anything to go on these two models will represent just six per cent of sales.

However, having seen the way that 320d pulled away from me on the Autobahn while probably returning 15 or 20mpg better economy it's easy to see why so many people are now plumping for the diesel option, especially when our bizarre company car tax system is taken into account. And if you're lucky enough to be one of those first owners of an E91 320d Touring look after it as I'll be looking to take it off your hands after 18 months or so to replace my E46 version. Has anyone else noticed that 91 is almost exactly twice the number 46, and while the new Touring might not be twice the car, it's damn close ●

