

Bavarian Motor Works

An exciting trip through Bavaria and the Alps in BMW's 135i convertible – sometimes topless, with natural and man-made obstacles to conquer

MOTURING EDITOR DIETER LOSSKARN PHOTOS DIETER LOSSKARN AND SUPPLIED



THE GUY BEHIND ME DRIVES QUITE WELL. OBVIOUSLY LOCAL. OK, let's go for it. We're in Austria, in the bends-rich Ötztal. Yes, close to the location where they found Ötzi the Iceman. I grab the chunky M-style steering wheel, mobilise all the 135i's 306 horses... and we're sliding through hairpins, roaring around bends. The exhaust sound is fantastic – especially in those Austrian tunnels, you get the full sound repertoire. Topless, this is an amazing wellness treatment for your ears. The brisk acceleration of the twin-turbo six-cylinder allows me to overtake three cars in a row with ease – and I lose Niki Lauda for a while. Not long and he is back on my tail again. This sheer driving pleasure goes on for about an hour and a half. Nice... until he puts a flashing blue light on his dash.

'This will be expensive,' I say to my fiancé, Susi, in the passenger seat. Back home in South Africa she drives a slightly less powerful black 120i convertible, just to avoid situations like this one. Austrian policemen are known for being absolutely relentless. Especially if you're coming from across the border – from Bavaria – with a Munich number plate on your vehicle.

The uniform is taking his time approaching the Beemer. With the facial expression of a staunch National Party politician suffering from a stomach ulcer, he says: 'I think I don't have to explain anything.' I just shake my head. 'I've counted 20 traffic violations in the last 90 minutes.' My brain works in overdrive: according to Austrian law that means about €2 000, the car and court time.

The last couple of days flash by in an instant. Munich, the capital of the Free State Bavaria, is actually not only the richest but also one of the most beautiful and exciting cities in Germany – and it's the homeland of BMW. And they proudly show it. The BMW Welt is a stunning architectural masterpiece lying close to the Olympic stadium as well as the famous BMW headquarters, aptly named the four-cylinder. Customers come from all over Germany to receive their new Beemer here. There are also three excellent restaurants in the building. It is a true mecca for blue-white petrol-heads – and it's known to have converted owners of other German cars, after a visit here!

If you're more into classic cars then BMW won't leave you wanting. The multi-storey BMW Classic building in Munich's Schleissheimer Strasse is a celebration of the heritage of the brand. It houses some interesting pieces of the BMW collection that are not on display in the public museum, along with the company's corporate archives and vehicle workshops. Opened in 2008, it has the technicians and the historical know-how to restore to pristine condition any vintage or classic Beemer ever built. I loved the 'barn find' in the entrance hall. A completely unrestored, vintage BMW that was recently discovered in Romania, it is displayed in a 1:1 workshop diorama. The previous owner requested to leave it 'untouched'.

Over three floors visitors can take in decades of BMW history. A lot of the cars on display are used in local and international movie productions. Remember the 'radio-controlled' 7-series from the Bond franchise's *Golden Eye* and *Tomorrow Never Dies*? It's there, with bullet holes, parked right next to the stunning Z8 used by then-007 Pierce Brosnan.

But Munich is not only about cars, it is also about food. One of the most famous restaurants resides in the heart of the city. Dallmayr consistently kept its two Michelin stars over the years, thanks to celebrity chef Diethard Urbansky and his palate-shattering culinary creations that are served in an elegant, intimate atmosphere. And if you're looking for a more contemporary-cool dining experience then you'll find it at La Baracca, where simple but excellent Italian food is served by the two chefs. Yes, each of them has two Michelin stars to his credit as well.

A heavy Austrian accent pitchforks me back into the harsh present: 'Do you understand me,' the uniform barks at me impatiently. 'Ja, Herr Officer, you know, I am living in South Africa and whenever somebody comes that close to my car, literally filling up the rearview mirror, my brain automatically switches to hijack mode, resulting in an instant flight instinct.' I'm trying to stay serious, he isn't quite sure whether or not I'm kidding... but obviously he doesn't want to create an international incident. He can't lose face either. After a while, an almost unbelievable compromise – maybe a first in Austrian law enforcement – is reached: 'If you pay €100 on the spot,

I will give you just four speeding tickets – and you can go.’ I breathe a sigh of relief – the holiday is not over yet.

Up the Timmelsjoch mountain pass and into Italy, where slightly more petrol-headed uniforms roam the alpine countryside. I’m getting more and more used to this little fun car. Until Susi destroys my confidence. ‘You know, I think the 1-series is a typical woman’s car. You look too big in it.’ Is that so? Passing through tiny villages I’m secretly trying to catch a glimpse of myself behind the wheel in some of the shop windows. I think she’s right... but the car is still fun to drive. Until the next day.

We stayed over in a small B&B in a quaint Italian mountain village with one of those beautiful-sounding pasta-dish names. We arrived there on a picture-perfect late summer day. The next morning it is – winter. Snow everywhere. And we have summer tyres fitted to our car. After breakfast it had thawed a bit, but we still had the 2 500m-high Bernina Pass in Switzerland to conquer, before heading back into Germany.

The higher we got the more snow we hit. The outside temperature was –2°C. Closer to the top the strong wind turned into a blizzard. The car was pirouetting precariously close to the abyss where a couple of other surprised tourists were already stuck, probably freezing to death in their metal coffins. We decided to back down again, carefully. The second attempt was in the tracks of an ascending bus, with snowchains on his tyres. But he was too fast! Beaten by a bus with snowchains on his tyres. Yes. We couldn’t keep up and the wind covered the bus tracks immediately.

A petrol-station owner down in the snow-free valley suggested a cappuccino and another try in a couple of hours, when the temperatures were supposed to be a bit higher. And he was right – we made it over the pass the third time around.

The rest of the trip we were spared any more natural disasters – we were cruising topless through the most beautiful scenery in the Bavarian countryside. And we experienced another absolute must for petrol-heads. Near the cradle of motorkind, at the outskirts of Stuttgart, the Meilenwerk is situated within the V8 Hotel. To describe it as a paradise for motoring enthusiasts would be a gigantic understatement. This is nirvana and mecca combined. One of Germany’s oldest airports, built in the Bauhaus style, it was converted into a theme-based hotel. Stay overnight in the drive-in cinema, at the gas station or in the workshop, where you will sleep in a cut-open Morris Minor. In the racing room you can step onto the winner’s podium, in the car wash you can enjoy a rain-shower... and the V8 camping room gives you the feeling of sleeping under the stars.

The Meilenwerk itself features lots and lots of car-related shops and the opportunity to store your classic or exotic car in glass boxes (a bit like a sleeping Snow White) and have it serviced by professional restorers and car-care specialists.

On the way back to Munich we once again enjoy legal travelling speeds beyond 200km/h on the Autobahn. If only for short periods, the traffic in Germany is just too dense. I’m sure as long as Germany builds cars like the 135i there will never be a general speed limit on the Autobahn. TB



CAR LIFESTYLE

BMW 135i convertible

Engine 3.0-litre in-line six-cylinder petrol
Power 306hp
Top speed 250km/h
0-100km/h 5.5 sec
Consumption per 100km 9.3 litres
Price from R510 000
bmw.co.za

WHERE TOP BILLING STAYED

V8 Hotel in Meilenwerk, Stuttgart
Stunning car-themed boutique hotel in an historic, Bauhaus-style airport.
Graf Zeppelin Platz, 71034 Böblingen (Stuttgart)
0049-7031-306-9880, v8hotel.de

Sofitel Bayerpost

Historic hotel with a wonderful ambience in the heart of Munich.
Bayerstrasse 12, 80355 München
0049-89-599-480, sofitel.com

WHERE TOP BILLING DINED

DO&CO at the BMW Welt
Great restaurant in the architectural masterpiece of the BMW Welt.
Am Olympiapark 1, 80809 München
0049-89-358-274910, doco.com

Restaurant La Baracca

Fantastic Italian restaurant with a relaxed atmosphere.
Maximiliansplatz 9, 80333 München
0049-89-235-193417, labaracca.eu

Brasserie Oskar Maria

Fine dining in a former church building.
Salvatorplatz 1, 80333 München
0049-89-291-96029, oskarmaria.com

Landhaus Tanner

Country-style gourmet food in rural Bavaria.
Aglassinger 1, 83329 Waging am See
0049-86-816-9750, landhaustanner.de

Dallmayr Restaurant

Finest dining and gourmet deli shop, in the heart of Munich.
Dienerstr. 14-15, 80331 München
0049-89-213-5333, dallmayr.de

NOT TO BE MISSED

BMW Group Classic

Schleissheimer Str. 416, 80935 München
0049-89-382-30401, bmwgroup-classic.com

Meindl Leather Factory

Dorfplatz 8-10, 83417 Kirchanschöring
0049-86-859-850, meindl-fashions.de

ESCADA SE

Einsteinring 14-18, 85609 Aschheim/München
0049-89-994-41707, escada.com



MINI COUPÉ TOY STORY

It looks like a toy but it goes like hell. With Mini there is always talk about this go-kart-style driving experience.

On first impression you think, 'What the hell happened to this Mini? Did somebody step on it?' It is Mini's very first two-seater and it was created for just one purpose: pure and unadulterated driving pleasure. For the brand it is some sort of true racing history revival.

The newest Mini, launched impressively at the recent Frankfurt Motor Show and shown at the Joburg Exhibition in October, looks like it is wearing a giant baseball cap backwards... and it can be ordered with the most powerful engines in the brand's line-up. From the 122hp of the Mini Cooper Coupé, all the way up to the explosive John Cooper Works Coupé with incredible 211hp.

Mini Coupé

Power 122hp / 184hp / 211hp
Top speed 204 / 230 / 240km/h
0-100km/h 9.0 / 6.9 / 6.4 sec
Price R264 000 (Cooper Coupé), R319 000 (Cooper S Coupé), R369 000 (John Cooper Works Coupé)

