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Newsletter for the St. Louis Chapter of the BMW Car Club of America

Summer 2009





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Gesundheit

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President's Letter

The Empty Nest Car Show

About five years ago when I married Debbie, we merged our five kids into one big happy family. We rearranged the house, made places for everyone to sleep and even set up temporary living arrangements for someone in the basement, “the concrete condo” as the kids call it.

We all lived happily together for several years. Then slowly but surely, the kids grew up, graduated high school, took off to college and left home.

Debbie's son, Jason, moved to Florida to work for Disney. My son, Matt, graduated college, moved back to St. Louis, got a job and bought his own house. Mike was living in Columbia with one more year to go to finish up his degree. Then last fall our youngest two, Tim and Sarah, moved to Columbia go to go school.

That accounted for all of them. One in Florida, three in Columbia and one in his own place. Our nest was empty. The kids were gone. Debbie and I were alone. We were expecting to be depressed, lonely and sad that the kids left the nest. We were. For a while.

A few days after the kids had left, Debbie and I were sitting at home watching TV. A revelation came over me. I grabbed the clicker, hit the MUTE button, looked at Debbie and said very seriously, “I don't miss them at all. I'm glad they're gone. This empty nest thing is great.”

Debbie stared at me for a second, speechless. I thought I was going to be chastised for being a bad parent, an uncaring father, a cold selfish pig of a man who doesn't miss his kids.

She choked out some words, “I feel the same way. I'm glad they're gone, too. I feel bad admitting it, but it's so nice to not have to pick up after them.” Then a big ear-to-ear smile came over her face.

So much for the parental depression that's supposed to overpower us when the kids leave home. We were gleeful, ecstatic, wallowing in the quiet, going to bed at 9:00 o'clock, not worrying about what time everyone would come home. It was bliss. We could cook for ourselves and not worry about feeding the kids who never liked what we cooked anyway.

The infinite versions of rap-crap music no longer vibrated our ceilings. Hundreds of dollars in food didn't disappear every week. My beer supply didn't vanish after I went to bed. It was great. We were kids in a candy store. We love the children dearly, but since life moved them out of the house we're enjoying our new freedom.

Well, it only lasted a few months. They're back.

I forgot about summer break. I forgot that Mike would graduate and come home. All of a sudden our empty nest was repopulated. Our food started to disappear, my beer expense tripled (and I never get to drink any). We had to turn our alarm system off because they came and went at all hours of the night.

I grabbed the clicker and muted the TV.

“Is this another family meeting?” Debbie asked.

I told Debbie, “I forgot that they would be coming back. The freezer is full of frozen pizza again. The grocery list includes chips, peanut butter and, Mountain Dew. The driveway is full of cars. Our lifestyle has reverted to pre-college levels. We're parents again.”

We gathered our thoughts and relaxed a bit. “In a month, they'll be going back to school,” she said. “The cars in the driveway are BMWs. Mike and Matt both drive BMWs. Their girlfriends drive BMWs. All of their college-graduate friends are buying BMWs. Sure the kids are home for a while but, while they're here, you're surrounded by your favorite cars.”

She made a good point. I had a BMW car show in my driveway everyday. She knew my weak spot and she reminded me of it. Since I'm prone to having BMWs gather as a group, I organized a family event, a car wash. We fired up the power washer, invited their friends with BMWs and spent the afternoon washing cars.

Two of them go back to school pretty soon. Only one remains in the nest but he is finalizing his new job and looking for apartments.

I'll miss the kids but they're off preparing for the rest of their lives so I understand their absence. But what I'll really miss is the BMW car show in front of the house.



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Upcoming Events

September 2009

September 1, 2009: The **St. Louis BMW Club Monthly Meeting**. 6:30 p.m. at **Growlers Pub**. 3811 S. Lindbergh Blvd., St. Louis, MO, 63127.

September 19, 2009: The St. Louis BMW Club is very pleased to announce another **Street Survival School** at Gateway International Raceway. Keep an eye on this website, your Club e-mail reminders and the Gesundheit for more information and the date that registration will open. For more information send an e-mail to our Street Survival School Chairman at streetsurvival@stlbmwcca.org.

October 2009

October 6, 2009: The **St. Louis BMW Club Monthly Meeting**. 6:30 PM at **Pujols5 Westport Grill** (Westport Plaza), 342 Westport Plaza, St. Louis, MO 63146

November 2009

November 3, 2009: The **St. Louis BMW Club Monthly Meeting**. 6:30 PM at **Autohaus BMW**, 3015 S. Hanley Road, St. Louis MO 63143

November 7 - 8, 2009: Frost on the Pumpkin Driving School. The St. Louis BMW Club is holding a High Performance Driving School at Gateway International Raceway on Saturday, November 7 and Sunday, November 8, 2009. There are no Friday sessions. Registration will be done through MotorSports Registration. For more information, see the HOME page of this website or go to MotorSportReg (link to this site is on the HOME page). You can also e-mail our Driving Events Coordinator, Julian Cates at drive@stlbmwcca.org.

December 2009

December 1, 2009: The **St. Louis BMW Club Monthly Meeting**. 6:30 p.m. at **Growlers Pub**. 3811 S. Lindbergh Blvd., St. Louis, MO, 63127.

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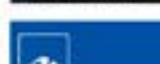
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Icons for Connoisseurs - Thirty Years of the BMW M1



Munich. The star came in pure white: When the 64th Paris Motor Show opened its gates in autumn 1978, sports car fans and lovers had only one destination – the stand of BMW Motorsport GmbH. There they were able to admire a super-low, dynamic new model which made it clear at very first sight that this was Germany's fastest road-going sports car: the BMW M1, 1,140 millimeters (44.9") high, 204 kW (277 bhp) strong, and well over 260 km/h (160 mph) fast. "Everybody was crowding around BMW's new mid-engined sports car", wrote the press. And: "The list of orders coming in exceeds even the wildest expectations – an American fan of BMW, just to mention one example, has already put in an order for three M1s."

That was quite something, considering that BMW's super-sports car had a price-tag back then in 1978 of exactly DM 100,000, enough for four BMW 323is plus a couple of optional extras. It is fair to say that few cars have ever been expected with such excitement and anticipation as the BMW M1 which represented all of BMW's know-how in motor racing. Project E 26, as the then still nameless M1 was initially called within the Company, had started in 1976. This was to be the first really unique car built by BMW Motorsport GmbH, BMW's motor racing subsidiary established in 1972. The racing company, having already made a great name for itself in the international racing scene with the fast BMW 2002 and the highly successful

BMW 3.0 CSI, now planned to lift this success to an even higher level with a competition car specially built and prepared for the Group four and five racing series.

According to Group four regulations at the time, qualification required a production run of at least 400 units in 24 successive months, it had to have two seats and bear a distinct resemblance from outside with its production counterpart. That made it quite clear that the E26 had to be not only a thoroughbred racing car, but also a street-legal sports car.

A Bavarian with Italian blood.

The problem was that BMW Motorsport GmbH totally lacked the capacity to develop and build such a car all by itself. After all, this team of specialists had concentrated on turning series-production cars into racing cars, making the chassis and suspension tauter and the engine more powerful.

In its lines and design, the new coupe was intended to clearly boast that special Italian style. It was modelled around the gull-wing turbo, a turbocharged concept car created in 1972 by BMW designer Paul Bracq. Proceeding from this design study with its rounder lines, Giorgio Giugiaro created the sharp profile of the M1 with its distinct, almost jagged edges and corners. Bracq and Giugiaro had already cooperated in the past in creating the BMW 6 Series coupe.



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—EST. 1985—
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First choice in the engine department: a inline-six engine.

Choosing the engine, BMW Motorsport GmbH initially focused on two concepts: Advance studies of Formula engines had led to a ten-cylinder code-named the M81, a V-engine with its cylinders at an angle of 144°. Suitably modified, this engine was also examined for its possible use in a sports car. But then the team around BMW's Motorsport Director Jochen Neerpasch quickly opted in favor of a new inline-six, an engine concept supported by the excellent experience BMW had gained in the CSI races.

After all kinds of rumours with the grapevine running wild, BMW unveiled the secret in spring 1977, officially confirming the development of the new super-sports car. Then, in autumn of the same year, BMW published the first photos of the M1 in production trim. The car then made its first public appearance half a year later: Together with TV presenter Dieter Kürten, Jochen Neerpasch proudly introduced the Group four version in the colors of Motorsport GmbH in a prime-time Saturday evening sports program on Channel Two of German Television. Although this racing machine bearing number eleven was not yet ready to go, the first test drives were scheduled for April 1978.

277 bhp in a purebred sports car.

The big day finally came in autumn of the same year. The public was able to admire the first E26 at the Paris Motor

Show. By that time the car bore the model designation M1 standing for the first car developed and built by BMW Motorsport GmbH.

Measuring 4,360 millimeters (171.7") in length, 1,824 millimeters (71.8") in width and 1,140 millimeters (44.9") in "height", the M1 exuded a genuine flair for power. This mid-engined sports car was driven by a 3.5-liter inline-six fitted lengthwise in front of the rear axle and developing maximum output of 277 bhp. Code-named the M88, this engine was based on the volume-production six-cylinder combined with the four-valve cylinder head carried over from BMW's CSI racing engines. Within this two-piece cylinder head, the lower section formed the combustion and coolant chamber, the upper half comprised the camshaft bearings and cup tappets.

The fuel/air mixture was delivered through three double throttle butterfly manifolds featuring six 46-millimeter individual throttle butterflies to the cylinders through two intake ducts per cylinder measuring 26 millimetres (1.02") in diameter. The all-electronic digital ignition system also reflected the latest state of the art.

Dry sump lubrication bore clear testimony to the sporting genes of the M1, the car being able to achieve a very high level of lateral acceleration. Fuel was supplied to the engine from two tanks right and left in front of the rear axle, each with a



capacity of 58 liters (12.8 Imp gals). From the engine power was transmitted through a ZF five-speed gearbox connected to the engine by a two-plate dry clutch. The final drive differential came as standard with 40 percent locking action.

264.7 km/h (164.1 mph): Germany's fastest sports car.

The six-cylinder engine was smooth and free of vibrations throughout its entire range of engine speed, even remaining quite docile at lower speeds. This changed instantaneously once the rev counter hit 5,000 rpm. From there the M88 pushed the M1 forwards up to its top engine speed of 7,000 rpm with gusto making even the most jaded car testers wax lyrical: "Once the throttle butterflies are fully open you feel a tremendous kick from behind continuing well beyond the 200 km/h-mark. There is no need to shift to fifth gear, for example, until you reach a speed of 213 km/h (132 mph) and from there you continue to accelerate up and up to the car's top speed." Which, as recorded by Germany's leading car magazine in autumn 1979, was 264.7 km/h (164.1 mph). Acceleration from 0-100 km/h in 5.6 seconds also looked very good, which is not surprising considering the power-to-weight ratio of 4.7 kg/hp, making things relatively easy for the 204 kW (277 bhp) engine.

The M1 was conceived and built for racing right from the start. The elaborate suspension with double wishbones on each wheel, gas-pressure dampers and two anti-roll bars remain in command throughout the car's entire speed range. With the exception of the more comfort-oriented response of the moving parts and the modified spring/damper setting, the road suspension was identical to the chassis and suspension

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on the Group four racing version. Four inner-vented brake discs ensured phenomenal stopping power from any speed and the front axle came with 30 percent anti-dive minimising body movement even when applying the brakes all-out. Tires measuring 205/50 VR 16 at the front and 225/50 VR 16 at the rear were certainly very big and muscular in those days.

A low center of gravity of just 460 millimeters (18.5") above the road, track measuring 1,550 mm (61.02") at the front and 1,576 mm (62.04") at the rear, together with the mid-engined concept providing weight distribution of 44.1/55.9, made the M1 a genuine performer in bends, even though the car called for an experienced driver when pushed to the limit. Typical of a mid-engined performance car with a low level of inertia around its vertical axis, the M1 required quick and forceful counter steering as soon as lateral acceleration exceeded a reasonable limit and the rear threatened to break away. But the rack-and-pinion steering without power assistance and with a direct transmission ratio was perfect for this kind of control. Displaced castor and a small steering roll radius served at the same time to combine ease of control with supreme road contact absolutely essential for the active driver. The twin-joint safety steering column, in turn, was adjustable for reach.

A racing car with crash-proven passive safety.

Although the M1 was a sports car par excellence, both the driver and passenger enjoyed a certain standard of comfort. Though the suspension was firm and taut, it nevertheless absorbed bumps on the road without requiring the occupants

to take any heavy jolts. Indeed, the driver and passenger were safely cocooned in a rectangular steel-profile space-frame complete with a bonded and riveted plastic skin free of distortion. The luggage compartment beneath the front lid was sufficient for a weekend for two, and even air conditioning was available. And the BMW M1 was safe: Since the new sports car received general homologation for the entire production series (as opposed to individual approval of each single model one-by-one), BMW was required to substantiate the passive safety of the M1 in a series of crash tests – a precaution which later benefitted many a racing driver.

While the public was admiring the new super-sports car from Munich, with orders coming in one after the other, production of the M1 suffered a nasty setback: Lamborghini was unable to assemble the new car as planned and the order instead had to go to Baur, the coach-building specialist in Stuttgart. This made the M1 a genuine challenge in the production process with the space-frame built by Marchesi, the glass-fibre-reinforced plastic body shell by T.I.R., both in the Italian town of Modena, and Giorgio Giugiaro's company ItalDesign assembling these two basic units and adding the interior trim and equipment. From there the car went to Stuttgart, where Baur fitted all the mechanical systems and components.

A big attraction in Formula 1: the Procar Series.

Facing these delays and re-planning requirements, BMW suddenly became hard pressed for time. After all, 400 units of the new car had to be built within 24 months for homologation



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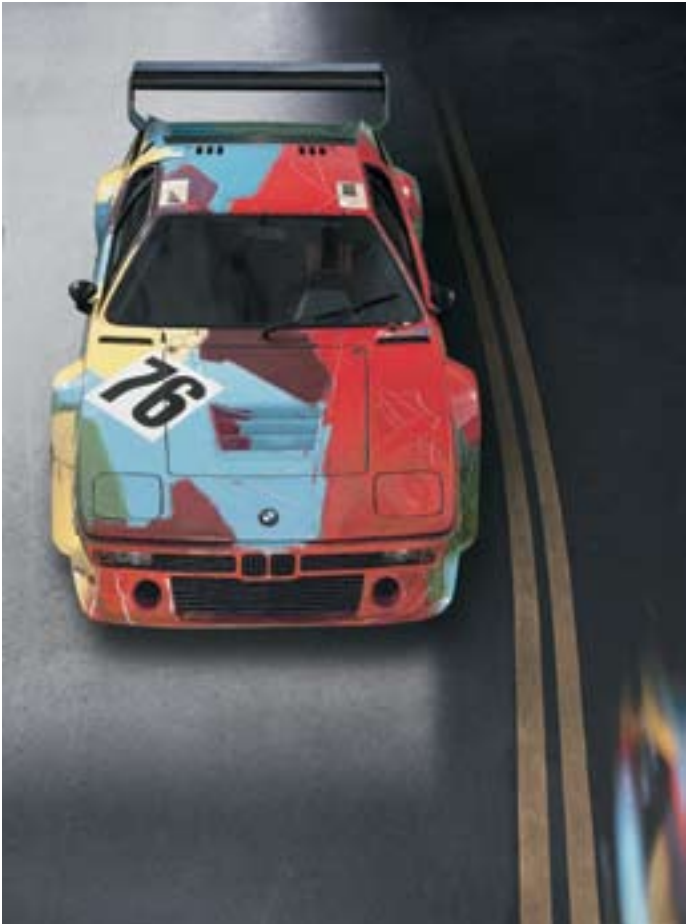
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as a Group four competition car. And other companies were also pressing forward. So to get the M1 on to the race track faster, Motorsport GmbH Director Jochen Neerpasch, teaming up with Bernie Ecclestone and Max Mosley, launched the Procar Series with races held just before most of the European Formula 1 Grand Prix events in the 1979/80 season.

The big difference versus the road going car was the engine of the Procar racing version. The first step for motor racing was to tune the M88 six-cylinder the classic, conventional way, with new camshafts, larger valves, forged pistons, optimized flow ducts, slides instead of throttle butterflies and a modified exhaust system boosting output to 470–490 bhp. With this kind of power, the Procar version weighing just 1,020 kilos and fitted with the longest transmission ratio had a top speed of approximately 310 km/h (192 mph). Goodyear racing tyres measuring 10.0/23.5 x 16 at the front and 12.5/25.0 x 16 at the rear, together with a mighty rear wing, served to provide the right kind of grip on the road. Driving one of these Group four BMW M1s, Marc Surer lapped the Northern Circuit of Nurburgring in just 7minutes 55.9 seconds.

Built to Group four regulations, the M1 was not only placed at the disposal of five Formula 1 drivers in each race for the Procar Trophy, but was also sold straight from the factory as BMW Motorsport GmbH’s first ready-to-go racing car at a price of DM 150,000. And indeed, some of the most renowned racing teams quickly took up this offer. Schnitzer and Heidegger raced their own M1s on the track, just like Osella in Italy and Ron Dennis in Great Britain.



Specifications BMW M1 – production model.

Engine	Water-cooled inline-six in mid-engine arrangement Four valves per cylinder, two overhead cam-shaft with double roller chain drive
Capacity (cc)	3453
Stroke (mm/in)	84/3.31
Bore (mm/in)	93/3.68
Max output (kW/bhp)	204/277 at 6,500 at rpm
Max torque (Nm/lb-ft)	330/243 at 5,000 at rpm
Max engine speed (rpm)	7000
Mean piston speed at max output (m/sec)	17.4
Compression ratio	9:1
Fuel supply	Kugelfischer system mechanical fuel injection three double throttle butterfly manifolds with six throttle butterflies, dia 46 mm
Fuel grade (RON)	98
Fuel tank capacity (litr.)	(2 x 58) 116
Lubrication	Pressure-circuit lubrication with dry sump oil system Triple suction pump next to crankcase, pressure pump in the oil sump

Electrical system.

Battery voltage (V)	12
Battery output (Ah)	55
Alternator	14 V/65 A
Ignition	Magneti-Marelli contact-free, all-electronic digital ignition system controlled by the flywheel
Spark plugs	Bosch x 4 CS

Power transmission.

Clutch	F + S hydraulically operated, double-disc dry clutch
Gearbox	ZF five-speed manual gearbox with integrated final drive Transmission ratios, manual gearbox: 1st 2.42 2nd 1.61 3rd 1.14 4th 0.846 5th 0.704 Reverse 2.86
Final drive	4.22



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Putting up a unique show for the crowd: Driving skill was the decisive factor.

Benefitting from this combination of BMW M1s prepared for racing by Motorsport GmbH and those entered by private teams, and with the cars driven by the big names in Formula 1 as well as ambitious racing drivers in other categories, the Procar Series gained unique popularity. This is where the world's best drivers faced the old hands and newcomers in the scene, comparing their skills with cars virtually identical in every respect. The crucial factor, therefore, was driving skill – and this really caught the attention of the crowd. The Procar races proved just as popular as the ensuing races for the Formula 1 World Championship.

The recipe for success was perfectly prepared. The fastest five Formula 1 drivers in the Friday practice sessions were placed against 15 touring car specialists. With the Procar races held on the Saturday, the first five places on the grid went to the stars. The remaining places were shared by the touring car cracks lined up according to their practice times. And they all joined in: Drivers and racing teams were happy to participate in the Procar Series, provided they were not barred from doing so by their contracts.

“Maybe I was so fast because I just wanted to drive a BMW.”

This is why on 12 May 1979, the Saturday before the Belgian Grand Prix in Zolder, the two fastest drivers in practice were unable to take their seats in the M1: Gilles Villeneuve and Jean-Pierre Jabouille had exclusive contracts with other car manufacturers. But Jacques Laffite, the third-fastest driver in the practice sessions, was just as happy to start his engine

Chassis and suspension.

Frame	Spaceframe with plastic body
Front axle	Double track control arm (wishbone) with light-alloy wheel mounts Independent suspension
Rear axle	Double track control arm (trapezoid arm at the bottom) with light-alloy wheel mounts Independent suspension
Dampers/springs	Bilstein gas pressure dampers Concentric coil springs adjustable for height
Anti-roll bar dia (mm/in)	front 23/0.91 rear 19/0.75
Brakes	Inner-vented fixed-calliper disc brakes in two-circuit system with brake servo pressure reducer on the rear axle
Brake disc dia(mm/in)	front 300/11.81 rear 297/11.69
Brake disc width (mm/in)	front 32/1.26 rear 26/1.02
Swept brake area (cm²)	front 96/wheel rear 69/wheel
Parking brake	Operated mechanically, acting on separate brake callipers on the rear axle
Steering	Rack-and-pinion steering, two-joint safety steering column adjustable for reach
Steering wheel dia (mm/in)	360/14.2
Wheels	Cast light-alloy wheels front 7" x 16" rear 8" x 16"
Tyres	Pirelli P7 front 205/55 VR 16 rear 225/50 VR 16

Dimensions (mm/in).

Wheelbase	2,560/100.8
Track, front	1,550/61.0
Track, rear	1,576/62.0
Length	4,360/171.7
Width	1,824/71.8
Height, unladen	1,140/44.9
Ground clearance, laden	125/4.9
Turning circle	13,000/512

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in BMW's mid-engined Gran Tourisme as Clay Regazzoni, the reigning World Champion Mario Andretti, as well as Niki Lauda and Nelson Piquet.

Nelson, who later became Formula 1 World Champion with Brabham BMW and at the time No. 2 in the Brabham Team after Niki Lauda, was unable to anticipate his great career back then when he said, grinning: "Maybe I was so fast because I just wanted to drive a BMW."

But Nelson's competitors also had great names and a great reputation: Hans-Joachim Stuck, who a day later came eighth in the Grand Prix racing for the German ATS Team, the then reigning Formula 2 European Champion Bruno Giacomelli, BMW Motorsport drivers Toine Hezemans and Dieter Quester, as well as Elio de Angelis, another star in Formula 1. When the lights switched to green in this truly outstanding line-up of Procar drivers, Hans-Joachim Stuck and young Austrian star Markus Höttinger pulled away from the rest of the grid after just a few laps. But in lap twelve the two of them got a little too close for comfort and ended up in the fences. So to quote a report on the race summing up the 20 laps, "Italian driver Elio de Angelis proved to be the superman in the first M1 race, not only winning the event, but also completing the fastest

lap. And this was after starting from 15th place and plowing his way through the entire field." Second place went to Toine Hezemans, Clay Regazzoni finished third.

The Procar Champions: Niki Lauda and Nelson Piquet.

Ultimately, however, the initial results started to change in the course of the Procar season, Niki Lauda, already two-time Formula 1 World Champion back then, scored the largest number of points by the end of the season. In eight races in the M1 Procar Series, Niki scored three wins and finished second in one race. So while Hans-Joachim Stuck was able to bring home victory in the last two races, he ended up five points behind Lauda when the season finished. Clay Regazzoni held on to his third place until the end of the season.

Winning the last three races in the 1980 series, Nelson Piquet brought home overall victory in Procar racing a year later, followed by Alan Jones and Hans-Joachim Stuck. Maybe this was no coincidence, since Alan Jones, who later became Formula 1 World Champion, was a dedicated fan of the M1 anyway, as one of the first customers to buy this sports car for private use.

These spectacular events more or less marked the end of the M1 in Group four racing for a simple reason: The M1 was only



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homologated for racing on April 1st 1981 and the regulations were changed just nine months later, making it virtually impossible for the M1 to compete any more.

Boosted by up to 1,000 horsepower: Group five M1 with biturbo power.

Even the success of the M1 in Group five was unable to match the overwhelming Procar Series. Group five was for special production cars derived from cars homologated in other racing categories – and that was virtually the only restriction. The first M1s to enter Group five were powered by normal-aspiration engines developing maximum output of almost 500 bhp. To cope with engine torque of up to 800 Newton-meters or not quite 600 lb-ft, these cars featured a Hewland FG 400 five-speed gearbox, with locking action on the final drive ranging from 75–100 percent, depending on the racetrack. Later, the engines of the Group five M1 were boosted up to 1,000 bhp by two turbochargers. And to get as much of this huge power on to the road as possible, the body of the car was modified by all kinds of spoilers turning the M1 into real “wing monsters”. This was also when Team Schnitzer, the leading BMW tuning specialist, turned a Group five M1 into the then most powerful racing car in the German Motor Racing Championship, using a kevlar body on a specially reinforced chassis. With this kind of power, Hans-Joachim Stuck came home first on both Nürburgring and Salzburgring.

The IMSA GTO Champion in the USA: BMW M1.

1981 was a spectacular year of success for the M1 in the USA. Any driver wishing to play an important role at the time in the popular IMSA GTO Championship simply had to drive BMW’s mid-engined coupe. After forming the Red Lobster Team, Dave Cowart and Kenper Miller finished the season first and second, naturally both at the wheel of a BMW M1. The white number 25 M1 won twelve out of 16 races in the Championship. Only one driver among the top ten in the 1981 Championship drove

another car. The driver who finished seventh, incidentally, was US racing legend Al Unser Jr., naturally at the wheel of an M1.

Presenting art on fast wheels: M1 Art Car in the 24 Hours of Le Mans.

The M1 was not only an outstanding racing and sports car, but also an equally unique work of art. In 1979 world-famous pop art idol Andy Warhol tried his hand on a ready-to-race M1 coupe, using his brush and paint to turn the M1 into one of the fastest works of art in the world.

This was BMW’s fourth Art Car, a series of artistic achievements based on various BMW models. Warhol was the first artist to paint the body of the car directly with powerful swipes of his brush: “But the car is better than the art”, Warhol said himself afterwards in a rather dry comment.

Boasting number 76, the BMW M1 Art Car struggled for the title in Le Mans throughout the whole 24 hours, ultimately finishing the race sixth.

Transplanting the M1 six-cylinder into production cars: the M5 and M 635 CSi.

Production of the M1 ended in 1981 after a production run of 445 units, 399 for the road and 46 in Procar trim. But the heart of the M1, the M88 six-cylinder 24-valve power unit, was far too good to retire from the scene. It was much too progressive and powerful. So in 1984 Motorsport GmbH once again hit the headlines, making aficionados of high-performance cars wax lyrical once again when the 255 km/h (158 mph) M 635 CSi coupe and the M5 brought back the M1’s fast-revving power machine.

The hand-built M5 quickly became a real legend. This was truly a wolf in sheep’s clothing, with maximum output of 286 bhp almost three times as powerful as the 518i. At first sight it almost looked the same as its large-volume counterpart, top speed of 245 km/h (152 mph) quickly captured the attention and admiration of countless owners of large sedans and sports cars having to give way to the M5 on the Autobahn even with the gas pedal pushed right down to the floor. Not surprisingly, therefore, this marked the birth of the “Businessman’s Express”.



Where Does The Road Take You?

This wasn't a summer full of road trips for me. We're in the middle of a home addition project so we tend to stay around in case anything catches fire during construction. There was one trip to the lake, but otherwise my car is in service as a daily commuter. Not a bad gig for a 27-year-old-car.

It's not like I log an excessive amount of miles. In fact, there were a few weeks there when the odometer added no miles at all—because it stopped working.

A short search on the internet led me to a company that makes and sells odometer gears for my car. They're not really hiding in the dark recesses of the internet with a name like odometergears.com. And I only had to take the gauge cluster out 2-3 times to get it right, which is par, considering my handicap. It became so addictive I took it out one more time, in the parking lot of the parts store, to replace the cluster lights. You may never enjoy the difference a fraction of a watt can make to illuminating your speedometer.

Many months ago, I broke one of the HVAC slider knobs on the center consol. Luckily the 635 LeMons car shares several parts with my car, so a new slider assembly was sourced from the parts pile. It kinda sorta looks right. Removing the entire dash is not particularly enjoyable, but I managed to get some other projects finished while I was in there. Now the ashtray and lighter have lights glowing, dimly, so I can put hot things where they belong instead of on my knee.

Then I decided I just *had* to know what condition the rear of my car was in, so I took off the bumper without any particular plan for getting it back on. The rust was pretty bad below the tail lights so I ground away as much as I could get to and took it by a couple body shops.

While I'm happy to blow tens of dollars on light bulbs and fuses, the body work is just too rich for my blood. Through skill, daring and a knowledge of the game, I settled on an amazing fix: aluminum tape.

I slathered the area with POR-15 then layered aluminum tape over the gaping holes. I clapped the dust from my hands and admired a job well done: the back of my car looked like a Wrigley's gum wrapper. It was alright, but it just didn't look intentional.

"I know!" Next I masked off a line around the rear valance and sprayed satin black epoxy paint on the lower half. From a distance it looks kinda sorta like a black bumper with a glittering strip of chrome above it. Taste-ful, yet subtle.

I replaced the broken power antenna with a \$8 special from Advance Auto Parts. It looked ridiculous, brushed the low hanging branches in front of my house and worked great until a car wash tore it off.

A pair of rear speakers salvaged from a donor car didn't fit right the first time I installed them in the rear window. The speaker covers rattled with the bass, even on Rick Astley songs. One more afternoon of removing the rear seat and tidying up the speaker holes in the rear deck and De La Soul comes burbling out without distortion.

And therein lies the joy of having a beater old car, BMW or otherwise. Everything I've done to it (and the money I've sunk into it) has made it more personal. The new exhaust bangs against the bottom of the car because "O.E.M" doesn't always mean original equipment. It's kinda sorta of like it should be, but maybe for a car that was built two months later. And when I finally got fed up with the same warning lights for "brake lights" and "license plate" winking at me every time I started the car, I unplugged the warning light display... while sitting at a stop light.

Next up is swapping out the springs in hopes of a more compliant ride. Oh, and while I'm in there, I'll take vice grips and bend the rear brake heat shield back so it stops rubbing against the rotor when I make right turns.

I made a promise to myself, after replacing all the front end components before driving to Baltimore that I would go a year without my car being in the shop. By the time you read this, that year will be up (and it will probably be in the shop again).

I've had plenty to keep me busy without the road trips. My car takes me plenty of other places, like the parts store. It takes me back in time when I set my iPod to a mix of hits from 1982. Where does your car take you? Share your stories with your fellow members. E-mail me at gesundheit@stlbmwcca.org.

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