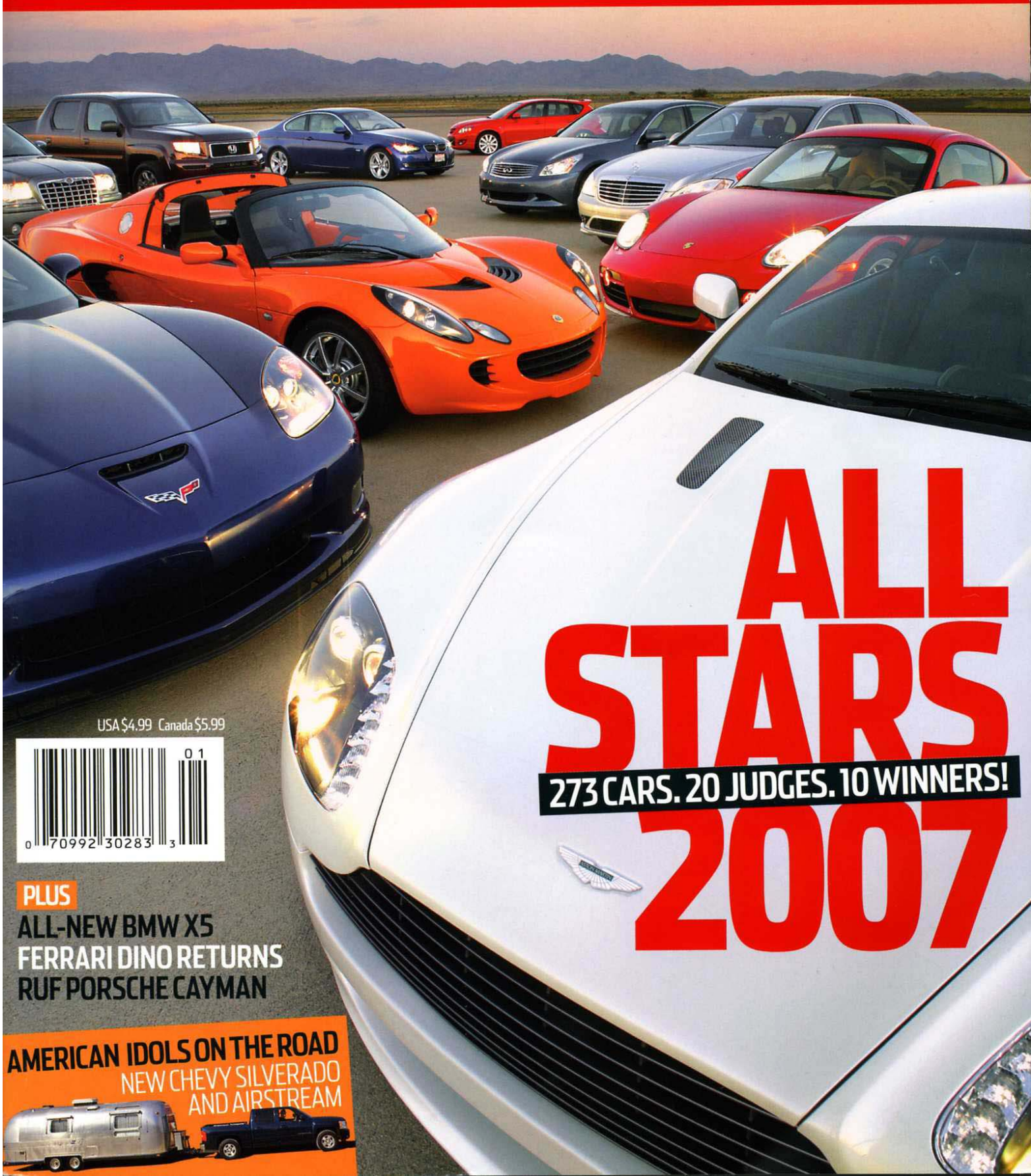


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the BALANCE point

Look inside the 3-series and you'll find the ghost of BMW's first sport sedan, the legendary 2002.

BY MICHAEL JORDAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW YEADON



The BMW 3-series is now one of the most popular cars in the world. Some 408,937 examples left BMW assembly halls last year, more than 40 percent of the company's global production. But when you grab hold of the steering wheel of a 3-series, it's the spirit of the BMW 2002 that you're channeling through your hands. This almost painfully plain, two-door sedan from the 1960s happens to be responsible for almost everything we know and love about the BMW 3-series today.

It all started in 1963 with the development of the BMW 1600. BMW had emerged from the shadow of bankruptcy in 1959 when the Quandt brothers rescued it from the clutches of Daimler-Benz, so when the company decided four years later to develop an affordable two-door sedan, it did so as cheaply as possible and with parts available from the recently introduced BMW "Neue Klasse" four-door. On March 9, 1966—one day before the car's official introduction at the Geneva auto show—the BMW 1600 was unveiled for the first time as part of a display in front of the Munich opera house to celebrate BMW's fiftieth anniversary.



Like a four-wheeled fishbowl, the stripped-to-the-core 2002 seemed plain to American drivers, who asked for ever-

increasing amounts of equipment and began a trend that led to the heavily optioned 3-series of today.

It was an era of muscle cars, even in Germany, so it's no surprise that BMW engine guru Alex von Falkenhausen soon decided to build a muscle car for himself by yanking out the 85-hp, 1.6-liter four-cylinder engine from his personal 1600 and replacing it with a 100-hp, 2.0-liter four from a four-door sedan. At the same time—and without knowledge of von Falkenhausen's conversion—BMW's planning director, Helmut Bönsch, had the exact same operation performed on *his* personal car. (Neither man knew of the other's car until one day in 1967 when both vehicles were parked in



BMW's in-house workshop.) Soon the engine swap became a matter of company policy; production of the BMW 2002 formally began in January 1968. By 1970, twenty percent of all 2002s were being sold in the United States. The 2002 was far more successful here than the 1600 that preceded it and essentially established the then virtually unknown BMW marque on our shores. It isn't an exaggeration to say that BMW owes nearly its entire U.S. presence to the car.

Just last year, BMW completely restored this particular 1973 BMW 2002tii with almost entirely new parts. Built in a glass-enclosed workshop adjacent to the BMW museum in Munich, the car is a promotion for Mobile Tradition, a BMW division that's responsible for keeping in stock a wide range of replacement parts for classic BMWs. When we picked up the tii in San Francisco for a couple of days last summer, it was easy to think of it

enthusiasts of the late 1960s loved the BMW's spare, functional look and practical-yet-sports-car-eating performance. The Bay Area had long been one of the epicenters of sports car culture in the States, and the 2002's rejection of Nixon-era glitz suited a generation that had read *The Whole Earth Catalog*. Like so many Americans, they had already grown to like the idea of German engineering because of the popularity of the Volkswagen Beetle, and so, to them, the 2002 came to signify speed and quality in a way that the Alfa Romeo GTV, the Datsun 510, and the Ford Lotus Cortina never could.

The thought of a 2.0-liter, SOHC four-cylinder engine doesn't exactly set the soul on fire, especially when you know that it comes from a design that dates to 1960, but then you look down to see that the 2002 is effortlessly wafting along the Junipero Serra Freeway at 80 mph. Thanks to a light, 2310-pound pack-

far across the tachometer dial at 4500 rpm, but the engine wants to pull strongly across the scale to the horsepower peak at 5800 rpm. The power also seems to swell as the vehicle increases speed, a feeling that BMW still builds into its products today.

The tii also feels effortless on Skyline Boulevard, the two-lane highway along the crest of the San Francisco peninsula that winds through a forest of coastal oaks and redwoods. The 2002 has a long-travel, independent rear suspension, which in the early 1970s was a relatively rare and magical technology, and it helps deliver a supple sure-footedness that set the BMW apart from the live-axle British sports cars and American pony cars of the time, which bucked, bounced, and bounded like donkey carts. You can drive as fast as you dare, but the 2002 always approaches every corner in the same way, rolling decidedly and understeering

WHEN YOU WALK UP TO THIS '73 2002tii, IT SEEMS BARELY THERE, A POCKET-SIZE SEDAN. BUT DRIVING IT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE.



as a kicky but irrelevant salute to the wacky 1970s, a tooty-fruity tribute to an era of bright colors and bad taste. But then we drove it, and driving made all the difference—just as it should in a BMW.

When you walk up to this '73 2002tii (Touring International Injection), it seems barely there, a pocket-size sedan. This car is engineered rather than styled, so its most remarkable exterior feature is a wafer-thin roof supported by delicate pillars. Once you climb into the 2002, you find flat, vinyl-covered seats, a bus's steering wheel with a rim of black plastic, and almost nothing of visual interest. The small instrument binnacle contains cheap, black-faced dials with faintly scientific faces. Altogether, the 2002 has the stripped-down character of German design in the postwar years, when making do with less was a matter of necessity, not philosophy.

Here in the San Francisco Bay Area, car

age, even 100-mph-plus cruising is possible with the tii's 125 hp. In the late 1960s, so many 2002s were seen at flat-out speeds on German autobahns that the car became known as the *Flüsternde Bombe*, or "whispering bomb," as if it were some kind of Luftwaffe secret weapon left over from World War II.

There's no secret technology to this BMW engine, though, just sound design. The two-valve aluminum head has semihemispherical combustion chambers, while the iron block is so stout that it became the basis for the famous 1300-hp, turbocharged BMW Formula 1 engine of the early 1980s. The 2002tii, imported to the United States between 1971 and 1974, featured Kugelfischer mechanical fuel injection, which helped add 28 percent more power to the output of the standard 2002 engine and, more important, also met the recently introduced U.S. air emissions regulations. The tii's torque peak lies pretty

determinedly, the steering wheel heavy in your hands.

Once you dive off Skyline Boulevard and onto Alpine Road, the rest of the 2002 comes into play. The unassisted worm-and-roller steering is very accurate, a remarkable thing in the days when not much was expected from a strut-type front suspension. At the same time, the steering is also remarkably slow, so you need your best rally-car hand discipline to windlass the oversize wheel back and forth to follow the tight, deeply cambered corners through the redwoods. The 2002 prefers to track through the corners, letting its steel-belted, 165HR-13 Michelin radial tires (originally an extra-cost option) do all the work, but if you jump on the brakes too late and stand the car on its nose, the semitrailing arms of the rear suspension will toe out and let the back of the car slither sideways. This combination of slow but accurate steering and a rear

suspension that can be eager to deliver directional assist went on to define the BMW 3-series until the 1990s.

Only the diehards noticed when the 2002 disappeared after 1976. Altogether, about 400,000 cars with the 2002 designation were built before production stopped in July 1976, just about the number of 3-series that BMW now builds in a year. Only 86,887 2002s were sold in the United States. The rampant currency inflation of the early 1970s had made the 2002 seem very expensive, and few people seemed disappointed when the 320i replaced it, although the new car proved to be heavy, slow, and lacking in personality. For a while, 2002 loyalists inspired a big market for high-bolstered sport seats and small-diameter steering wheels, but when the 1980s arrived and everyone had money, sales of 3-series BMWs boomed as 2002s were left to rust into oblivion behind college fraternity houses.

Today the 3-series is BMW's public face around the world, but its character still has much to do with the 2002—the impression of functional German engineering, the swell of power from a smooth-running engine, the communicative steering, and the supple ride. Yet there are times that this spirit of the 2002 seems a little too deep inside the modern 3-series, as if it has been overwhelmed by thirty years of sedan-think, an ever-increasing



burden of leather-upholstered, electronically distilled this and all-weather, triple-variable that. When the 2002 was new, it called out to young drivers, and every weekend you would see several of them on Skyline Boulevard, just back from an adventure in the cool, green light beneath the redwoods.

BMW won its reputation in the 1960s because its cars were comfortable, practical, and easy to drive—in addition to being just plain fast. This is the combination that defines BMW. Yet the balance between comfort and

performance is a delicate one, and the modern 3-series is in danger of tipping the scales in the wrong direction as it becomes ever larger, ever more complicated, and ever faster. More horsepower might not be the answer. It might be good to think of the 2002 as the balance point, a sedan with the simplicity and soul of a sports car. That's what first led Americans to turn their hymnals to verse 2002, just as our founder, David E. Davis, Jr., famously noted in 1968. ■

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GALLERY

History for Sale or Rent

BMW Mobile Tradition will give anyone a classic experience.

Just like the car from the old Johnny Cash song, "One Piece at a Time," this BMW 2002tii was built part by part. There were about 4000 parts—reportedly worth a total of \$80,000—but they weren't stolen one at a time in a lunch box and assembled later, as in Cash's song about a Cadillac factory worker. Instead, this car came together out of a catalog from BMW Group Mobile Tradition, which keeps a large stock of parts for historic BMW cars and motorcycles.

BMW Mobile Tradition itself came together in 1994 from BMW's classic-car operations. The experts at Mobile Tradition authenticate BMW vehicles, restore historic cars for the BMW museum, provide advice to private owners



regarding vehicle restoration, and more. Mobile Tradition estimates that its active clientele own some 120,000 vintage cars and 65,000 classic motorcycles among them.

In recent years, many car companies have become involved with old cars as both an image-building medium and a revenue source. Bentley and Rolls-Royce have been in the game seemingly forever; Jaguar formalized its operation in 1983. Mercedes-Benz recently opened a new Classic Center that sells vintage



cars in volume. And now Ferrari's Classic division has been organized to authenticate older Ferraris, remanufacture parts, and restore customer cars.

Last spring, we visited Mobile Tradition in Munich, where 400 BMW cars and 170 BMW motorcycles are stored in an old military barracks. It was a treasure



trove of artifacts. Upstairs, we saw a '73 2002 Turbo—a rare, 170-hp supersedan. In the public display area, we came across a '67 Lola-BMW Formula 2 car that's powered by a version of the 2002's engine.

Of course, there are rare historic cars at lots of car companies' museums these



days, but BMW will let you actually drive some of them. True, it's a little more complicated than renting a car at the airport—you can get more details at www.bmw-mobiletradition.com. But for your daydreaming enjoyment, the rate card for Mobile Tradition's complement of classics is below.

MJ

Model	One day/100 km	Weekend/200 km	One week/500 km
BMW Isetta 300	\$745	\$1071	\$1754
BMW 700LS	\$745	\$1071	\$1754
BMW 1802	\$627	\$836	\$1285
BMW 2000ti	\$627	\$836	\$1285
BMW 3.0CSi	\$745	\$1071	\$1754
BMW Z1	\$627	\$836	\$1285