



Smooth ride, comfy cabin, loads a space. Oh, and 191mph. One nine one!

## ALPINA B5 BITURBO ★★★★★

*The new BMW M5 arrives later next year. Alpina's is on sale now. By Greg Fountain*

**PRICE** £69,995 **ENGINE** 4395cc 32v V8 biturbo, 500bhp @ 5500rpm, 516lb ft @ 3000-4750rpm **TRANSMISSION** Eight-speed automatic, rear-wheel drive **PERFORMANCE** 4.7sec 0-62mph, 191mph, 26.2mpg, 252g/km **WEIGHT** 1920kg **ON SALE** Now

ANY COMEDIAN WILL tell you that it's a sign of either arch-confidence or morbid complacency to send on stage a warm-up act who's funnier than you. The forgotten comic I saw headlining at London's Meccano Club back in the '90s was supported by a young Alan Davies and an unknown trainee doctor called Harry Hill. History has done the rest.

Let's hope the new BMW M5 is reading this, because it's not due on stage until next year, yet right now its audience is being warmed up by a simply brilliant understudy wearing an identical suit: the Alpina B5 Biturbo.

As you know, Alpina is a unique outfit, a purveyor of fabulously exclusive BMW-based epics that somehow combine total faithfulness to the original with a level of bespoke-ness so rich the company is classed as a car manufacturer in its own right.

The engineering differences between Alpina models and the BMWs that spawn them are usually

fairly overt – Alpina favours turbocharging and auto gearboxes, while the M Division has made its name on natural aspiration and a bone-shaking ride. But the M5 will be the first M saloon to pack a turbo – two turbos, to be precise – and thus its 4.4-litre V8 will be exactly the same as the engine in the B5. The twain *shall* meet. This should be interesting.

The engine itself is tuned to produce 500bhp, leaving the B5 somewhat shy of the M5's likely 578bhp, but it's hard to imagine needing more power than this. The car is deeply, devastatingly quick, particularly so when it mines its vast torque reserves (516lb ft) in the mid-range. Urged on by the ZF-designed eight-speed auto 'box, you fire through the cogs like a machine gun minus the kick, at no time doubting the claimed 4.7sec 0-62mph benchmark. Frankly, it feels faster than that. And 191mph is not just believable, it's inevitable.

The gearbox is truly a work of art, using a unique single-cylinder

step-down to retard fuel injection into a given cylinder for a split second, thus allowing the 'box to handle this much torque. In manual mode it's even better, because they've replaced the paddles with two tactile aluminium buttons on the back of the wheel, and you can use them freely to skip gears on the downshift. Playtime!

The headline act, though, is the ride. Alpina has chucked out the hateful runflats, retuned BMW's adaptive dampers and dropped the whole rig closer to the road, creating

unrecognisable refinement while maintaining the 5-series gift for body control. They've got the steering right, too – improving the 5-series set-up for more meat at speed and less heft when parking – presumably sending flustered BMW helm boffins scuttling back to their computers.

Sounds like the B5 is nigh-on perfect, then? Not quite. There's an unavoidable feeling that the 530d can do virtually everything for a fraction of the B5's £70k, and although the diesel is slower, the B5 has played all its best cards before you get to high-speed handling. At the limit, all-round smoothness isn't the personality you really want, no matter how deliciously rare. No, you want uncompromised talent and bad-mannered arrogance. You want the M5.



5.0-litre V8 biturbo matches old V10 M5 on power, trounces it for torque

