

M2 rewards
the committed,
focused driver



Get the line wrong, and
everything that follows
will fall apart too

BMW M2 PROTOTYPE

Instant classic

On paper, brilliant. And the track confirms that it really is special

Full concentration now. Focus on the track and stop playing mind games. Driving position? Check. Mirrors? Check. Cabin temperature? Down to 20°C; outside, it's already 33°C, and lunchtime is still one hour away. Radio? Check. 'Track clear for the familiarisation lap.' Roger that.

I'm driving a pre-production prototype at the Salzburgring, and I haven't got long. Questions about how well-rounded and practical the new M2 is will have to wait until I have a completed car to drive and more time in which to drive it. Now, though, the priority is on one thing and one thing only: driving fast on a circuit that includes one very long elevated straight, two reasonably fast 120° corners and a small infield filled with wriggly stuff.

On lap number three, the lead driver in an M4 starts to press on, and his power and torque advantage lets him open up slightly wider gaps under hard acceleration. At 454bhp, the 3.0-litre twin-turbo straight-six fitted to the new M2 is 20bhp less potent than the engine installed in the (non-Competition) M3/M4. Maximum torque is an identical 406lb ft, available from 2250rpm, so you get exactly the same bottom-end punch, only in a tighter package. The bigger car does, however, retain a 35kg weight advantage, due to its more exotic materials.

At an expected 4.2sec, the version equipped with the eight-speed auto matches the 0-62mph time recorded for a manual M4. The provisional number for the manual M2 is 4.5sec. While the M4, when the unrestricted top speed option ticked, can top 181mph, the M2 peaks at 178mph. The difference in outright performance between the two is, on track, barely discernible. Same goes for auto vs manual: despite the tiny arithmetical disadvantage, the manual feels more inspiring and involving overall.

The M2 is for now rear-wheel-drive only, unlike the M3/M4, but it shares with them its adaptive M suspension, M compound brakes and variable-rate M steering.



Minus the disguise, M2 will reveal a classic

Compared to the M240i, the M2's enhanced stiffness and torsional rigidity yield flatter cornering as well as more grip and traction. While the M4 looked perfectly composed from behind, the M2 felt definitely more playful. Time the turn-in to perfection, get the steering angle absolutely right, synchronise the throttle input to fine-tune the momentum, and you won't sacrifice a single tenth. But get the line wrong or misjudge the entry speed, and everything that follows will fall apart, too. Through the track's two third-gear corners, the line between eventual understeer and early oversteer is narrow and wriggly.

The M2 is deeply involving. The steering feels a little meatier than in the M240i and more strongly centered than in the M4, the muscular inner-ventilated steel brakes become a bit heavy when pushed, the ride is unperturbed on the track but knobbly and not exactly quiet on the perimeter roads.

M4 or M2 – which one to take? The M2 gets the nod if the fun factor matters more than lap times and absolute performance. A fairly priced instant classic.

GEORG KACHER

First verdict

A junior M4, or a more extreme M240i; either way, a tremendously engaging and thrilling driver's car

★★★★★



THE FIRST HOUR

1 minute

I'm in a multi-hued pre-production M2 at the Salzburgring. In front, M's chief engineer Dirk Häcker in an M4

5 minutes

I'm driving a manual, rear-drive BMW saloon, in 2022, and I'm NOT dreaming?

16 minutes

Steering and brakes feel heavier than the M240i's

23 minutes

A fine line between under- and oversteer, it seems

25 minutes

There's a lot about this car that's non-standard, but it does bode very, very well for the real thing



PLUS

Fabulous straight-six engine and hilarious handling



MINUS

It's no magic carpet on rough surfaces; two doors limit practicality

Data

PRICE

£60,000 (est)

POWERTRAIN

2993cc 24v twin-turbo six-cyl, six-speed manual, rear-wheel drive

PERFORMANCE

454bhp @ 6250rpm, 406lb ft @ 2250rpm, 4.5sec 0-62mph, 178mph (all est)

WEIGHT

1810kg (est)

EFFICIENCY

28.4mpg (tested), n/a g/km CO2

ON SALE

October