

Road Racing Quietly

In a BMW 535 Sedan

By Roger Witherspoon

The sun was high, the road was dry the speedometer hovered around 110 and the twin turbos on the BMW 535xi sedan seemed to emit little more than a whisper as the Connecticut countryside whizzed by in a satisfying green blur.

Somewhere north of 60 miles per hour there had been a change in the gentle vibrations emanating from the 300 horsepower, six cylinder aluminum engine propelling the sleek, '08 midsize sedan with the distinctive split grill curved into a metallic grimace through the New England afternoon. This is a racer which can jump from zero to 60 miles per hour in just 5.6 seconds while accelerating up past 150, and one might reasonably expect the twin exhausts to thunder in the process.

Nor did the volume of sound change as the car rounded a wide highway turn with the speedometer still in triple digits. The rear, 18-inch wheels are an inch wider than the front pair and set at a slightly different angle. That physical characteristic combines with the traction and stability control, and all wheel drive to smooth out the curves and hold the road as if glued to a lane-sized groove.

But the 535 is tuned for a quiet ride, and if the wind howled or the tires hummed I was not aware of it. With the windows up and the sunroof closed, there was little to distract from the sound of Coltrane blowing gently over the 13, digital Logic-7 speakers except, perhaps for the unexpected vibration in the steering wheel. It seems the little camera built into the windshield determined the BMW was straying out of its lane and began vibrating the steering wheel to remind me to pay more attention to the road than to 'Trane – especially at that speed. So I slowed down, got back into the straight and narrow, and continued to enjoy the ride.

But then, that's the type of ride one might come to expect from an upscale, \$62,000 BMW – a technologically proficient, nimble, powerful, comfortable, high performing sedan which looks mean, devours the miles and takes few roadside prisoners.

The four-door 535xi is billed as a midsize sedan, which means the average NBA player might find the rear seats a bit tight, but those of us who do not dwell in the land of the giants can enjoy a comfortable cross country road trip in the front, or rear leather seats. If the weather is cold, the soft, padded leather seats and the leather-wrapped steering wheel – which telescopes and tilts – can also be heated. And if the summer sun is too much for the rear passengers, the touch of a button raises window shades.

If the outside was designed to be mean, the inside was intended to invite one into a comfortable den. The dark, polished, poplar wood on the dash, console and doors added an organic touch to a car designed for those who are enthralled by and comfortable with technology. The BMW's computer system, which has several programmable features to suit the tastes of the driver, takes some getting used to. But once its basic operational pattern is understood, the logic is intuitive and the system is easy to use.

Some of its technology is familiar. The xenon lights with automatic leveling and built in cornering, as well as the Bluetooth connectivity and satellite based navigation system are what you might expect on a car in this price range. Having AM/ FM and

Sirius Satellite radio might also be considered standard, as well as the six-disc, in dash CD player.

The HD radio with its additional two, high-frequency sub-stations for every regular radio broadcast station was an added bonus. Another was the built-in USB port for iPods and MP3 players, which allows you to bring a couple of thousand of your favorite musical friends along for the ride.

The little lane changing camera was not the only equipment embedded in the windshield. There was also a nearly invisible camera projecting a holographic display in the driver's line of sight out on the hood of the car, showing navigation instructions, cruise control, the speedometer, and engine alerts. The heads-up, holographic display has long been the province of Corvette. It is a safety innovation which allows drivers to keep their eyes focused firmly on the road rather than be distracted to the entertainment center in the middle of the dash, and should be incorporated in more high performing vehicles.

It is not surprising that computer magazines these days include several pages devoted to the latest in computer software for cars, which are increasingly dependent on technological innovation to control both comfort and safety. The technology of computerized stability and traction control are common. For the 535xi, BMW has added a brain to its brakes. If the driver suddenly lifts his or her foot off the accelerator, the car's computer assumes it is about to be brought down hard on the brakes and begins applying enough pressure to the brake system to push the brake pads firmly against the rotors and increasing the hydraulic pressure to make the pedal more effective and eliminate the need to pump it.. In the split second it takes for the driver's foot to come back down onto the brake pedal, the lag time normally required for the brakes to begin working has been eliminated and the deceleration time and distance is eliminated.

One does not spend a lot of time thinking about the technology while driving the 535 xi. The thought that went into designing this car was to create a comfortable and, if you wish, exciting motoring experience. On the open road, tapping the paddle shifts to move the transmission through six gears and slicing through the countryside at speeds well into triple digits will set one's heart racing a bit.

On the other hand, sitting back in the soft leather, putting Nina, 'Trane, Byrd and a few old friends in the CD player and setting out on a long, leisurely ride in the 535xi is an experience that is really hard to beat.

2008 BMW 535 xi Sedan

MSRP:		\$61,825
EPA Mileage:	17 MPG City	25 MPG Highway
Performance / Safety:		
	0 – 60 MPH	5.6 Seconds
	Top Speed	150 MPH

3.0-Liter DOHC Inline 6-cylinder aluminum, fuel injected engine producing 300 horsepower and 300 pound-feet of torque; twin turbochargers; 4-wheel ventilated anti-lock brakes; all-wheel drive; dynamic stability, traction, and brake control; double pivot

front suspension; integral link rear suspension; 6-speed automatic transmission; 18-inch alloy wheels; rack & pinion steering; halogen foglights; xenon adaptive headlights; front airbags, dual front door-mounted side impact airbags.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/ FM/ Sirius HD radio; CD and MP3 player and Logic 7 sound system; Navigation system; heated front seats and steering wheel; heads up display; Bluetooth connection; power sunroof; tilt, telescope steering wheel; fold down rear seats; adaptive cruise control