

# Feel the PASSION



The launch of BMW's M2 has been eagerly anticipated. Question is, has the wait been worth it? Kieran Rennie drives the car to find out...

**Car lovers can be fiercely loyal and intensely passionate about the brands they support. They can be so dedicated, at times, that common sense becomes uncommon. BMW is a brand that tends to elicit that kind of irrational reaction.**

There is no question that today's BMWs are superbly engineered and very well crafted. Every time I drive one I try my best to remove my fan cap and look for faults or disappointing elements. I hardly ever succeed.

Furthermore, if the impressive line-up of premium, performance oriented coupés, sedans and sports activity vehicles in the marque's line-up ever drifts toward the mundane, über supporters have more than

a couple of aces up their sleeves – the brand's M models.

Today, an ever increasing array of bulked up – in looks, not weight – hunkered down and force-fed high-performance machines roll out of the manufacturer's private M Division facility at the famed Nürburgring race track in Germany, where they are tuned and tested in pursuit of delivering pure driving enjoyment.

The tradition started in the early 1970s when the brand's first M-car, the M1, accelerated out of the facility's gates. However, it was only in 1979 that the first re-engineered road car – the M535i – made its equally breath-taking appearance.

Since then other feathers in the M brand's legendary cap have included the screaming, normally aspirated, 6,1-litre, V12 engine implanted into a folklore favourite, the McLaren F1.

Now comes the latest in the M car line-up, the BMW M2. Its launch at Johan Rupert's Franschoek Motor Museum race track in the Western Cape has been highly anticipated. Billed by BMW as an entry level M-car, the model aims to attract young buyers to a bespoke and exclusive club.

It looks potent. At the front, it's not so much the brand's familiar kidney grille that commands attention – more the trio of gaping mouths below it, each designed to



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**R 791 000**

allow cool air to flow unimpeded towards the engine bay and front brakes.

Along the flanks, widened wheel arches house large, ultra-low profile tyres. At the rear, protruding twin dual exhaust pipes manufactured from carbon fibre hold the promise of emitting high decibel screams. Taken together, each feature speaks quietly but purposefully about the coupé's intentions.

Obviously lower to the ground than the standard 2-Series, as it glimmers in early morning sunlight the M2 reminds me of a quiet, medium-sized bouncer – the unobtrusive kind you see at upmarket night clubs – the sort of guy who doesn't make

a big deal about his abilities, but you know from his muscled stance that he could slay you with a swizzle stick.

Don't get me wrong: I'm not saying the M2 is understated – I'm saying it's perfectly stated. To my eye it's a flawlessly proportioned thoroughbred.

That feeling is carried through to the car's interior. The cockpit of an M mobile has always been an impressive place to sit and, more importantly, from which to pilot the car. The very basics of the layout, and more specifically, the driving position, have been expertly refined – the position of the seat in relation to the steering wheel and pedal box; the siting of the instrument cluster

and other vital controls; the aura of command that's imparted as you look through the windscreen at the road ahead...

What the M Division has also been able to do is to add elements of class and sophistication to the model. Inside and out, for me the M2 represents a modern, edgy, ergonomically efficient interpretation of style.

Power is provided by a turbocharged 3,0-litre straight six – not the M3 motor, rather a 235i plant on steroids. The engine produces 272kW and 465Nm – with 500Nm available on over-boost – and propels the car to 100km/h in 4,3 seconds. Top speed is electronically limited to 250km/h but that velocity can be eclipsed if you opt for



the un-governed M Drivers Package, which enables a top-end of 270km/h.

Power delivery is silk-like – smooth, flowing and attention getting. The all-important exhaust note remains understated rather than loud – and this, I feel, is positive. Driving an M4 with a sports exhaust on the same day felt a little like owning a one year old Staffie – fun for a while but ultimately draining. For me the aural experience the M2 provides is wonderful, with harmony achieved between aggression, purpose and maturity.

Swapping cogs via paddle shifters through a seven-speed DCT ‘box is rewarding and immediate – but I might prefer the analogue six-speed transmission. The M2 is just that kind of car – a driver’s machine.

On the track chassis responsiveness and balance is phenomenal. The Dynamic Stability Control allows for foot-flat out-of-corner acceleration. This is both a good and a bad thing. Good if you’re talentless, bad if you’d like the rear of the car to break away when you ask it to.

Switch off the DSC and you’ll either find yourself facing the wrong way almost all of the time or heading to the tyre retailer every 5 000km.

For someone who revels in the joy of driving a good car quickly, how pleasurable it is to pilot a well-crafted, quick, rear-wheel-drive model. BMW’s Active M differential works seamlessly and unobtrusively to distribute torque equally under all conditions, totally eclipsing traction control systems based on individual wheel braking. Yes, the



diff is controlled by advanced digital trickery but, at its heart, it remains mechanical. And that, in my view, is what performance machines need.

Standard spec pricing is good – R791 000 buys you a bare-bones M2. The car we tested on the track would set you back R963 719. However, if I could level one criticism: All the stuff the cool kids are buying – things you really want in your M2 – inflate the price very quickly.

BMW South Africa, in its presentation at the launch event, described the M2 Coupe not only as direct heir to the successful BMW 1 Series M Coupe, but also – in its underlying philosophy – a descendant of the original E30 BMW M3 and the BMW 2002 turbo.

“The latter caused a sensation over 40 years ago, embodying the commitment of what is now BMW M GmbH, to outstanding dynamics, unbeatable agility and optimal car control,” says a spokesman.

Now I’ve not driven a 2002ti but I’m aware of what it represented at the time. Can the M2 make as heavy a statement in today’s motoring landscape? I’m not so sure. That’s not because the car lacks for anything. It’s because today’s buyers are spoilt for choice. Today’s buyers are easily distracted.

They’re more educated and more demanding. They’re less nostalgic. But hang on, what about those die-hard M car supporters we spoke of earlier? On second thoughts then, this car should live forever. ➤