

2015 BMW 2 Series

Overview

A new convertible model joins the BMW 2 Series lineup for 2015. Also new for 2015 is the availability of all-wheel drive.

The BMW 2 Series was introduced as all-new small sport coupe last year, billed as a spiritual successor to the BMW 2002, a small coupe with a cult following that was produced from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. By comparison, the BMW 2 Series is a monster, both in terms of power and weight, but the dimensions of the 2 Series are not far off from the e46 coupe, the two-door 3 Series generation from a decade ago. So just as yesterday's size 6 is today's size 0 in women's fashion, the same goes for BMW's so-called compact cars.

The 2 Series coupe and convertible seat four.

The entry-level BMW 228i is powered by a 2.0-liter turbocharged inline-4 that makes 240 horsepower and 255 pound-feet of torque. The line-topping M235i uses a 3.0-liter turbocharged inline-6 that makes a hearty 320 horsepower and 330 lb.-ft. of torque. Standard wheels are 17-inch alloys, while the M235i rides on 18-inch wheels wrapped with Michelin Pilot Super-Sport performance tires.

All-wheel drive is now available for 2015 BMW 228i coupes and convertibles as well as the M235i coupe. Rear-wheel drive is standard.

Also new for 2015 is the Track Handling Package, which adds variable sport steering, sport brakes and the adaptable suspension found on BMW's M performance vehicles, as well the Michelin Pilot Super Sport tires on BMW 228i models. These options make a significant difference in the car's handling, though they aren't necessary for everyday driving and, as with all BMW options, it can get pricey. Still, if you're a performance-oriented driver, it's well worth considering.

Much of what makes the BMW 2 Series great is its nimble rear-wheel-drive platform; in this case, the same used previously on the now-defunct 1 Series. Combined with BMW's signature 50-50 weight distribution, the 2 Series is perhaps the most tossable small premium coupe on the market now, especially considering many luxury manufacturers are offering entry-level cars on less expensive (and less fun) front-wheel-drive architectures, among them the Mercedes-Benz CLA-Class and the Audi A3.

Enthusiasts also have the option of a 6-speed manual gearbox, not available on the A3 or CLA-Class; the standard 2 Series transmission is an 8-speed automatic. Also, the 2 Series are two-doors, the Audi and Mercedes models are four-doors.

If we had a complaint, it would be that certain interior elements are not up to par, especially in the 228i. The plastic surrounding the instrument cluster seems cheap, and the trim on the armrest door handle looks stuck-on. Hard plastics are noticeable around cabin, especially in tan. Black interiors do a better job of disguising these surfaces.

Even though the 2015 BMW 2 Series is the most affordable car in BMW's current lineup, it's not exactly cheap. Starting at \$32,100, it's more expensive than the entry-level Audi A3 or

Mercedes-Benz CLA-Class sedans (though it's not unusual for coupe body styles to cost more). There's a hefty price jump between the 228i and the M235i, and options add up fast. Still, the 2 Series delivers design and performance worthy of a BMW and, in the right configuration, offers plenty of fun for the money.

Model Lineup

The 2015 BMW 2 Series comes in coupe and convertible body styles with a choice of two engines. The BMW 228i is powered by a 2.0-liter turbocharged inline-4 that makes 240 horsepower and 255 pound-feet of torque. The M235i uses a 3.0-liter turbocharged inline-6 that produces 320 horsepower and 330 lb.-ft. of torque. An 8-speed automatic transmission comes standard; a 6-speed manual is optional. Both gearboxes are the same price. Rear-wheel drive is standard, all-wheel drive is available on 228i.

15-228i-coupeThe BMW 228i Coupe (\$32,100) and 228i Convertible (\$37,900) come with automatic climate control, Sensatec faux leather upholstery, 8-way manually adjustable front seats, pushbutton start, power windows and mirrors, a tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel with multifunction controls, cruise control, BMW iDrive interface with 6.5-inch color display, trip computer, Bluetooth hands-free phone connectivity, an audio system with CD player, HD radio and satellite radio capability, 60/40-split folding rear seats, automatic stop/start, rain-sensing windshield wipers, automatic headlights and 17-inch alloy wheels on all-season run-flat tires. The convertible features a power-folding soft top.

15-m235i-coupeThe M235i Coupe (\$43,100) and M235i Convertible (\$47,700) upgrade with 10-way power front sport seats with 2-way power-adjustable side bolsters plus adjustable head rests and thigh support, a unique M Sport steering wheel, unique sport instrument cluster, power sunroof, a sport exhaust system, an adaptive M sport suspension, bigger brakes, variable sport steering, an aerodynamic body kit, xenon adaptive headlights, LED accent lights, retractable headlight washers, rear spoiler, and unique interior and exterior trim. Standard wheels are 18-inch alloys wrapped in Michelin Pilot SuperSport summer performance tires.

Many of the M235i's performance features are optional on the 228i. Packages include the Premium Package, which adds leather upholstery, keyless entry, ambient lighting, universal garage door opener, one-year satellite radio subscription, auto-dimming rearview and exterior mirrors; and the Technology Package, which includes navigation, real-time traffic, BMW Online and apps, Bluetooth audio streaming.

BMW xDrive (\$1800) all-wheel drive is available on all 2 Series coupes and 228i Convertible. (Prices are MSRP and do not include destination charge.)

Safety features include driver and passenger dual-stage front airbags, seat-mounted front side-impact airbags, driver and front passenger knee airbags, 4-wheel disc brakes with ABS, traction control, stability control and BMW's Assist eCall emergency telematics system with 10 years of service. Optional safety features include a rearview camera, an anti-theft alarm system, BMW remote services with remote door unlock and stolen vehicle recovery, and BMW's Active Driving assistant with lane departure warning, forward collision warning, pedestrian warning and city collision mitigation, and all-wheel drive.

Walkaround

The BMW 2 Series is in perfect proportion, with taut lines and a stance that matches its agile handling. The signature twin kidney grille is surrounded by wraparound headlamps and a wide lower air intake, creating a face that's neither too aggressive, nor too cute.

From the side, the 2 Series loses the 1 Series' saggy lower line created by its droopy rocker panels. Instead, the 2 Series gets a virtual sheet metal tummy tuck, with a sharp, straight rocker panel and an upward-curving character line that flows into the rear wheel arches. An upper line running from the front fender, through the door handles and into the rear decklid is straight and sharp.

The rear is clean and simple, with just the tiniest hint of shelfy-ness that seems to be fading out with the post-Bangle era. Wraparound tail lamps and hood cut lines are very straight and horizontal. We also like that the M235i places its dual exhaust pipes one on each side, giving it a symmetrical look.

The 2 Series Convertible has a low-slung look, with a rear end that looks slightly wider than that of the coupe. With the top down, the lines around the passenger compartment create a wraparound design, which designers say was intended to give the appearance of a boat deck. With the power-folding soft top up, the 2 Series convertible understandably doesn't look as sleek as the coupe, but still telegraphs its own unique, fun personality.

Color availability depends on model. The broadest palette is found on the 228i, with unique choices like Valencia Orange, Sparkling Brown metallic and Midnight Blue metallic. Shade choices are narrower for the M235i, and include whites, greys and black, plus the beautiful dark Melbourne Red and the bright Estoril Blue found on other M Sport models in the 3- and 4 Series lineups.

Interior Features

The look and quality of cabin materials vary depending on the model and options. Layout and organization of the controls, as with all BMWs, are clean, simple and intuitive. On cars with navigation, the wide screen sits atop the dash, which makes for very good visibility. Dual air vents, audio and temperature controls sit below, including a wide row of preset buttons, which can serve as shortcuts to navigation destinations and other functions, as well being traditional satellite and radio station markers.

On the center console, the most recent iteration of the iDrive button is located on the right side within easy reach. A traditional parking brake sits to the left. To the fore of the gearshift are two side-by-side cupholders. The center armrest offers a moderate amount of storage, and is where iPhones and other mobile devices can be plugged in and stowed.

Front seats are comfortable, and 228i models offer adequate support. M235i variants get sport seats, with more aggressive side bolstering on the seatbacks and cushions that keep driver and passenger firmly in place around corners. Standard upholstery is faux leather, dubbed Sensatec. Optional leather looks good but wasn't exactly soft and buttery. Visually, we particularly liked the leather interior in bold Coral Red.

Backseat space is expectably snug for a coupe but is fine for occasionally carrying average-sized adults on short trips. Legroom measures 33 inches, about three inches less than in the larger 4 Series Coupe. Plenty of toe- and foot room under the front seat helps to mitigate a cramped feeling. Headroom in 2 Series coupes is 36.5 inches, about on par with the 4 Series and the old 3 Series Coupe. A rear center console has cupholders for added convenience. When not carrying backseat passengers, the armrest folds down, revealing a pass-through slot for long items.

Convertibles get about a half-inch more headroom with the top in place, but legroom is reduced by more than an inch, making the drop-top best for two. With the top down, headroom is unlimited.

Cargo space in the coupe measures 13.8 cubic feet, about two cubic feet less than the 4 Series Coupe, but more than the Audi A3 sedan and Mercedes-Benz CLA-Class. Rear seats are split 60/40 and fold down for increased space. Surprisingly, BMW claims the 2 Series convertible has the exact same amount of luggage space as the coupe, which is quite a feat considering folding tops often take up considerable space.

In the cabin, BMW 228i models have a mostly attractive design, but we found the plastic surrounding the instrument cluster and in the center console looked a bit cheap for a BMW. The abundance of hard, plain plastics in the cabin is especially noticeable in tan; black interiors better disguise these textures.

M235i models look more upscale, but still suffer from some of the same maladies. On both models, the trim on the sweeping armrest/door handle is too thick for the average person to grab and looks stuck-on. Sun visors are also very thin, and the corners bend like cardboard when one is unhooked from its latch. On the M235i, we prefer the optional Brushed Aluminum interior configuration with accents in black gloss trim over the default Aluminum Hexagon trim, which includes metallic blue metal inserts that can look garish in certain color combinations.

How much you care about these details may depend on how much you're spending on the car. At \$33,000, BMW's interior execution isn't unconscionable. But with our test car topping out at nearly \$50k, we'd expect more.

Driving Impressions

It's clear BMW didn't cut corners on engineering. Notably, BMW keeps its performance-oriented, rear-wheel-drive platform on all 2 Series models, which is admirable at a time when other manufacturers are using less expensive and less dynamic front-wheel-drive configurations, like those found on the Audi A3 and Mercedes-Benz CLA-Class.

We're already fond of BMW's 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine in the 3 Series sedan and the 4 Series coupe, and it's even better in the 2 Series, given the latter's smaller size and slightly lighter weight. Although a bit noisy when pushed hard, the BMW 228i's 240 horsepower and 255 pound-feet of torque offers plenty of pep. With its sprightly characteristics, the four-cylinder is especially a great match for the convertible.

We drove a BMW 228i convertible with the Track Handling package, which adds variable sport steering, sport brakes and the adaptable suspension found on BMW's M performance vehicles, as well as sticky Michelin Pilot Super Sport tires and 18-inch wheels. These options make a significant difference to handling.

As expected, the turbocharged six-cylinder in the M235i is even more of a joy. It isn't exactly a svelte car; the curb weight with the automatic transmission is 3505 pounds, heavier than the 428i, yet lighter than the 435i with the same gearbox. But the rigid chassis, agile suspension and near-50/50 weight distribution handles the M235i's mass with panache.

At Las Vegas Motor Speedway, we drove a M235i coupe, also fitted with the adaptable M sport suspension, which we're told is specially tuned for this model and differs slightly from that in the 228i. On the speedway's oval track, we reached speeds of well over 100 mph, where the turns are banked by as much as 20 degrees. The M235i was perfectly stable and stuck its ground impeccably.

On the in-field road course, we kept it in Sport-plus mode and the car felt planted and hunkered down around the circuit, even when we turned in too early on the first lap around a couple of late-apex turns and pinched off the exit. In Sport-plus, traction control is off but dynamic stability control stays on, though at a lower threshold. As a result, the car didn't let us get too out of control, even when it wasn't always happy with our line through the corners.

Variable ratio steering does its job, tightening up at higher speeds and around corners, with very few turns-to-lock, enabling us to keep our hands at 9- and 3-o'clock at all times. Steering isn't overly heavy, unlike some cars made by other manufacturers that attempt to create an artificial feeling of sportiness via a ridiculously high steering effort.

Big brakes bit hard and fast, letting us push our braking zones just a little more with each lap.

Real-world driving proves nearly as satisfying. BMW says the M235i can sprint from 0-65 mph in 4.8 seconds, and we believe it. Merging onto the freeway with 320 horses on tap is a cinch, and we were surprised to look down at the speedometer in what seemed like no time at all to find we were doing 85 mph on the (straight) onramp. Hearty thrust comes from 330 lb.-ft. of torque, available as low as 1300 rpm. Passing is a breeze, and turbo lag is virtually nonexistent.

Even stop-and-go-traffic in the M235i is fun. Cruising the Las Vegas strip, our Melbourne Red Metallic test car took off easily at each green light, and the big brakes halted us firmly and confidently at every (inevitable) red light. The variable ratio steering was noticeable around town, too, allowing more maneuverability at slower speeds and in and out of parking spaces.

Plenty of interior insulation keeps road noise at a minimum, even in the firmer Sport and Sport+ modes. The cabin feels solid and well-damped at all speeds. Even the Michelin PilotSport tires didn't complain too loudly. We noticed some wind noise from around the A-pillar, but this is normal for the class.

Summary

The BMW 2 Series offers beautiful design, great proportions and unsurpassed performance in the emerging sub-compact luxury category. The M235i offers loads of power and fun on the track, and the 228i is plenty of car for the everyday driver. The coupes are practical with usable backseat space, and the convertibles are a joy with the top down.

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