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BMW X3 2.0d SE

Has BMW improved with the new model?

by Jonathan Goddard published on 3 February 2007

I've never really understood why anyone would buy a BMW X3. It's by no means a bad car - far from it, in fact. Sure, early ones looked a bit funny, the ride was unforgivably choppy and the interior had been built by Romanian peasants earning three potatoes an hour.

Strange pricing and some glaring deficiencies - most notably of all the fact it competes to some degree with its stablemate, the X5 - didn't put buyers off. It's still a mystery how it sells, but it does. On a drive from Norwich to London, I counted 16 of them - more than any other make of SUV on the trip.

And now there's a new one, which doesn't look remarkably different from the last one but somehow seems to iron out many of the problems.

Subtle changes to the interior and exterior give a fresher look. At the front, a larger kidney grille sits above a redesigned front bumper and spoiler. A colour-coded valance with vertical uprights sits below the dark swathe of the bumper, while the front foglights are now incorporated into the main section of the bodywork. The 3.0sd also gets bespoke 18in alloys as standard.

The side profile remains true to the original X3, meaning you still get the funny rear-quarter windows. But the new rear light clusters feature rods of LED lights and the styling of the rear bodywork has also changed with colour-coded panels now extending lower down the bodywork. The wheels still look way too small, though, giving it a bit of a toy car look.

On the inside - always a sticky subject for the old X3 - the driver benefits from a new style of three-spoke steering wheel while enhanced materials used on the centre console have been included.



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Thank god. The 3.0sd gets silly stainless steel foot pedals but, overall, while little has really changed everything is a great deal better; the cabin is a really nice place to be - unfussy, uncomplicated and comfortable.

Of the three engines, steer well clear of the 2.0 diesel. It really is utterly toothless and underlines the fact the X3 still has less off-road ability than a Panda 4x4 (and more girly proportions).

The 2.5 petrol and 3.0 diesel are the other two options, and while the 2.5 may seem like a decent compromise, it isn't. High emissions, poor economy and weakish performance scupper it entirely. Yes, the flagship 3.0 diesel is by far and away the best choice - giving the X3 the teeth it so badly desires. You get a load of power (286bhp), a 0-60mph time of just 6.6 seconds, and decent economy at 32.5mpg on the combined cycle.

But, by gosh is it expensive. And that's the rub. The X3 3.0d SE starts at a whopping £36,415 - which is only £8000 more than the already over-priced 2.0d. The M Sport version starts at £38,175.

So where does that leave you? To be honest, it leaves you in a very similar place to where you would have been with the old X3. A competent machine, for sure, and if it was produced by almost any other manufacturer it might make sense. But BMW already has the infinitely superior X5 and for the sort of money you'd be paying for a top-whack X3, surely it makes sense to go for a low-spec X5.

VERDICT

But with the entry-level X3 being so gutless, will you really be satisfied by saving the money and opting for one? Maybe but one crucial word of warning: worst of all factors about the X3 is that boot space is niggardly. You really do struggle to fit all the essentials two adults and two kids need for a 5-day break to Center Parcs.

At a glance

What is it?

4x4 from BMW

Good

Good styling, decent economy, fun to drive, massively improved interior

Bad

Expensive, rather pointless, tiny boot, not an off-roader, poor relation to X5

Verdict

Very competent and almost charming soft-roader that makes sense for the school run but not for anything else. Feels like one giant compromise

Price 28,560

Our score

6/10

Your score

?/10

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And that's a real disappointment because despite its multiple failings, I really like the X3 - even the 2.0d, which we had on test. It feels good to drive and it's fun. It's smart, too, but you'd always rue the fact you didn't splash out a few grand more for the X5.

TECH SPECS

BMW X3 2.0d SE

Engine: Inline four-cylinder 2.0 litre common rail diesel

Transmission: Six-speed manual

Top speed: 123mph

0-60mph: 10.2secs

Economy: 39.2mpg

Emissions: 191g/km