

Roundel

SEPTEMBER 2008

HERE IS NO LIMIT



7 SERIES SNEAK PEEK

HEARD ON THE Straße

By Bob Roemer

BMW's progressive party: Multiple sources are reporting that the 5 Series-based BMW Progressive Activity Sedan, apparently still nameless, will debut at next year's Frankfurt auto show. They also say its design incorporates several styling cues from the X6. We're eagerly awaiting BMW's definition of "progressive activities."

2010 Z4 roof choice: The latest word about the third-generation roadster is there are two types of convertible tops. The base model will come with a fabric roof; with the deluxe version, powered by the N54 twin-turbo six-cylinder engine, will feature a folding tin-top. A word to M product planners: Canvas is lighter than steel.

Twin-turbo X5 V8: An observant passerby recently spotted an N63 twin-turbo, 4.4-liter, 400-horsepower V8 under the partially opened hood of an X5 test mule in Munich. The engine, now optional in the X6, will be available in the 2009 X5—giving the car 450 foot-pounds of stump-pulling torque.

Speaking of the X6, an "Active Hybrid" Sports Activity Coupe prototype was spotted during testing in Death Valley wearing Illinois manufacturer tags just before this issue's deadline. Expect a 2010 introduction. A high-performance model was also spotted in the test fleet (see below).

Yet another twin-turbo model: BMW is readying the successor to the popular 540i and 550i six-speed sedans. The 555i, powered by the M63 V8 described above, is the flagship of the next-generation 5 Series to be launched next year. BMW has already trademarked the 555i nomenclature.

Pressurized M5 possible: There's still a chance that the next M5 could be powered by a twin-turbocharged S85 V10—enlarged to 5.5 liters, claiming 550 horsepower, and mated to the seven-speed M double-clutch transmission that debuted last May in the M3 convertible.

English-edition M3 book available: Three years ago Peter Sebald published his definitive book about the first-generation M3. However, *17,970 Emotions*—the title refers to the number of M3s BMW Motorsport built from 1986 to 1992—was available only in German. This summer the author introduced the English edition.

Its 454 pages and nearly 1,000 photo-

graphs present the complete E30 M3 story, including the history; insider information and anecdotes; interviews with managers, engineers, technicians, and test drivers; its development and production; complete specifications; and details about the racing program, with a chronicle of its historic results.

For a further description of what is one of the most comprehensive books about a single automobile—and ordering information—visit www.publics4drive.de. While you're at it, check out www.m3-klassik.de. At €200 (about \$300), it's more than a little lunch money—but if you own one of these iconic automobiles that (as *Car Magazine* once opined) makes a trip to the grocery store seem like a lap around the Nürburgring, then you understand.

Honda, Audi supercars on the Ring: Despite runaway gasoline prices, Honda is the latest Japanese manufacture to roll out a new supercar. Powered by a 550-horsepower, 5.5-liter V10, the next-generation NSX—due in 2011—is already testing on Germany's Nürburgring. And, according to Ring watchers,

whether to join this exclusive club.

Me, too: What design feature do the Cadillac CTS, Escalade, ESV, EXT, Pontiac G8, Range Rover Sport, Land Rover LR2, Ford Taurus, and Dodge Nitro share with current BMW M cars? The answer: front-fender vents, or as M designers call them, side gills.

What's the decision process to blatantly copy another company's design? As a meeting is wrapping up, does the product manager say to the stylist, "Oh, yeah, I almost forgot: While you're at it, slap on a couple of those fender vents to make it look like an M car."

Quote of the month: "A typical BMW customer is not going to move down to an [Audi] Q5. There is more of a chance that they would go for something like Mercedes' GLK. Just because Audi will price the car in the premium segment does not make it a premium vehicle."—a BMW spokesperson firing a shot in the burgeoning war-of-words between the two Bavarian carmakers.

Ingolstadt's return volley? "Audi makes premium cars, so the Q5 is a premium SUV. We will see what the customers have to say."



BREAKING WITH TRADITION? Although there was never an official policy, over the last ten years, the moguls at M have resisted the temptation to emulate rival Mercedes-Benz by slapping an M badge on the rump of every type of BMW, especially SUVs (sorry: SAVs). However, this X6 prototype—caught testing in Death Valley in July—makes us wonder if Munich's high-performance subsidiary is about to break with that tradition. Look closely and you will see four chrome tailpipes and a taped-over front-fender gill, telltale features of every current M product.

it looks set to shatter recent lap times set by the Lexus LF-A and Nissan GT-R. The NSX is reportedly equipped with an eight-speed semi-automatic transmission. Meanwhile, the new V10 Audi R8 is also testing on the legendary track. BMW is still considering

Question of the month: From the looks of this month's spy photo, BMW is getting ready to field its first non-car M special based on the recently released X6. If Munich takes this step, will it dilute the M brand? Send your opinions to letters@roundel.org. ♦