

Die Zugspitze

New York Chapter Newsletter | Fall 2016

www.nybmwcca.org



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New York Chapter 2016 Events Calendar

February	25	BMW of Manhattan Dealership Social
March	5	23rd Annual Beach Party
	26	New York International Auto Show
April	10	Driving School: NJMP Lightening
	17	Karts & Coffee
May	7	Endurance Karting Series
	22	Dine & Shine
	24	Endurance Karting Series
June	6-7	Driving School: Watkins Glen
	26	Karts & Coffee
July	16	Endurance Karting Series
August	21	Karts & Coffee
September	11	Wine & Shine
	18	Wine & Shine (Rain Date)
	25	Concours d'Elegance
October	16	Karts & Coffee

For the latest information, see www.nybmwcca.org

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On the Cover : *A Summer Day at Watkins Glen International* ~ Photo by Mike Allen

To join the BMW Car Club of America, call 1-800-878-9292 or visit www.bmwcca.org. BMW CCA national dues are \$48 per year, \$15 of which is for Roundel.

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New York Chapter BMW CCA Presents

Admission Fees for Spectators

Members of OWG	FREE
General Admission	\$10
Adults over 62	\$8
Youth (7-12)	\$5
(Payable at the gate.)	

Judging Classifications

Concours: Judged on interior, exterior, engine compartment, trunk (No undercarriage, tops up on convertibles)

Street: Judged on exterior only (No undercarriage; tops up on convertibles)

Tuner/Stance: Judged on interior, exterior, engine compartment and trunk (No undercarriage, tops up on convertibles), with a focus on creativity and uniqueness.

MINI Corral: Single class "Best of Show". Mini's only. Judged on interior, exterior, engine compartment and trunk (No undercarriage, tops up on convertibles)

Location

Old Westbury Gardens
71 Old Westbury Road
Old Westbury, NY 11568

Directions To Old Westbury Gardens

www.oldwestburygardens.org
For additional directions
call (516) 333-0048

Registration

Opens: September 1, 2016
Closes: September 21, 2016
Online Registration at
www.motorsportreg.com

For additional information

Go to www.nybmwcca.org or
contact Gordon DeShong with
subject line CONCOURS2016 at
srde28@hotmail.com

Concours d'Elegance

"Great Marques of Long Island"

on the beautiful grounds of
Old Westbury Gardens

Sponsored by:

RALLYE BMW

Sunday September 25, 2016 ~ rain or shine

Gates open at 8:00 AM for entrants, 10:00 AM for general public
Judging will begin at 11:00 AM (Polishing cloths down!!!)

Entrants Fees: (includes Gardens' admission fee for driver)

Pre-registration BMWs, \$40.00 (payment must be made
by September 21st);

Registration, day of event BMWs – \$50.00, space available basis

Pre-registration MINIs – \$20.00 (payment must be made by
September 21st)

Registration, day of event MINIs – \$30.00, space available basis

Display corral (not judged) for BMWs and MINIs only – \$15.00

Please make plans to attend this great event. Bring your family
out to enjoy a gorgeous Sunday on the Great Lawns of
Old Westbury Gardens.

President's Page | Mike Bizzarro



Election. With the veritable circus in the media for the US Presidential race, I'm sure most would agree that's a cringe-worthy word these days. But it doesn't have to be. It can be the start of something new, something bigger than the day-to-day grind, something spectacular... Ok, maybe I'm overselling it. :) It's that time of year again when we look to all of you for potential new Chapter board members. Now

is your opportunity to volunteer to help shape our Chapter's future. Please send candidacy statements to nominations@nybmwcca.org. Perhaps a cabinet position isn't your cup of tea, but you would still like to take a more active role in helping us create and host events; please e-mail your interest there as well. We would especially like to hear from more of our members north of the city.

With all that serious business out of the way...

From our membership table situated in the center of the venue, the New York Chapter was treated to front row seats at this year's Rallye BMW Motorsport show. Nick Soldo and his crew put on another fantastic event hosting nearly 100 show cars, with live music from the School of Rock, free i8 test drives, raffles, and a few special vehicles on loan from BMW North America for display. Held in June, this is an event you must put on your calendar!

Our friends, the NY Bimmers, have welcomed BMW CCA members to their weekly Euro Meet at Burger City in East Meadow, Wednesdays at 8pm. This is a relaxed, friendly, social gathering of all like-minded enthusiasts. Stop by or connect with them on Facebook @NYBimmers1.

Artur and the staff at Competition BMW in Smithtown are putting together a special treat for Chapter members. Prepare for the return of the 'Drive-in Movie'! Come back with us to a simpler time when going to the movies wasn't an ordeal of cell phones and sticky floors but a social gathering with some of the hottest rides. And don't worry; you won't have to sneak anyone in the trunk.

Before I go there's one more thing Fall brings us. This year, O'fest takes place in Monterey following on the heels of the Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion (of which BMW is the featured marque). This week-and-a-half is packed with enough nostalgia and excitement to overwhelm the senses. There are a lucky few of you making the cross-country trek for this historic event. Let's hear your story! When you return, send us your tales and pictures. For our winter issue we'd like to put together a section dedicated to our Chapter's contribution to this momentous event. Send all submissions to newsletter@nybmwcca.org.

Contributors wanted! Remember your first 2002? Have a BMW that's been in the family for generations? Want to share a funny anecdote about teaching someone to drive a stick, or a project car that just never seems to get finished? Send us your stories and photos and we may publish them in the Chapter newsletter. Send submissions to newsletter@nybmwcca.org

**BMW Car Club
of America
New York Chapter**



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All Things Aftermarket

Bargains of a lifetime

by Mitchell Frischer

I remember being a teenager and dreaming of the cars I could one day (hopefully) afford. A Porsche, a BMW, a Mercedes, and of course; a Ferrari. Fortunately I have owned all but one of those marques (Ferrari) and more. I've owned some pretty insane cars and, having been in the automotive aftermarket for many years, all of them modified to the Nth degree. Some of my favorites were my 2002 E46 M3, 2003 Audi RS6, 2004 Mercedes E55 AMG, 2004 Viper SRT/10, 1987 Porsche 944 turbo, 1987 Porsche 930 Slantnose, and even a 2006 MINI Cooper S (my current DD)

Let's choose just one of those cars, say...the 2003 Audi RS6. I mean, this (at the time) was a technological tour-de-force! With a twin-turbo V8 making 450 HP, a Tiptronic transmission with paddle shifters, HUGE 8-piston Brembo front brakes, 18-inch forged wheels, a dynamic suspension, flared wheel arches, HID lights, and more. I bought the very first one that landed, as I had the very first deposit in the U.S. It was gray with black leather interior and carbon fiber trim. It was fast. It was rare. And it was \$94,000 with tax out-the-door!

I then proceeded to bring it to my tuning shop and, having worked with some of the best tuners in the world, developed a system that turned the car into a 600+ HP fire-breathing monster that ran 11s in the 1/4, had adjustable sway bars front and rear, 19-inch 3-piece forged lightweight wheels with ultra-sticky tires, a full turbo back exhaust system with 200 cel cats, upgraded fueling system, upgraded intercoolers and more. I drove the car for a year and sold it to a client for exactly what I paid for it (given he got all the upgrades with it

minus the 19 inch wheels and tires) Today, a car just like it can be bought for less than \$30,000 in excellent condition with, say around 75,000 miles. Almost all are extremely well cared for and documented. Super-clean low-mileage examples get around \$35k. Now, considering that a near 600 horsepower (new production) car today cannot be had for less than, oh, \$70k? that makes this quite the bargain! Look at used E55 AMG's that have well over \$100k of car and upgrades now trading in the mid to low \$20k's! Where can you buy an ultra luxurious, solid as a steel vault, near 600 HP car for \$25k?!? You can't!

I tell you, these are the bargains of a lifetime. There are so many more. If you can find them. BMW M5's with V10 engines (rarer are the 6-speed manuals), Audi S6's with the de-tuned Lamborghini Gallardo V10's, Maserati Gran Turismos, Mercedes C63's...The list goes on and on! I mean, let's look at that last one for a moment. A used, C63 (say, 2010-2012) sedan can be easily had in very good to excellent condition for around \$25-\$30k. This car has a hand-built, naturally aspirated 6.2L AMG V8 engine making at least 450 HP. The basic architecture is the same as found in a \$200k + AMG SLS! What better exotic, European car with a monstrous V8 of recent can be bought for such a bargain? Maybe a V8 M3 but as much as I love those motors they don't make nearly as much torque as the AMG V8's do. Plus, with some bolt-ons and a tune you've got an eleven-second car that can hold four people and go grocery shopping!

I tell you, these are the times to buy the car you've always wanted but couldn't afford. It's only a matter of time before the collector car market comes for these cars as well. Who would've thought that a 1983 Porsche 911 SC with 100,000 miles on it could ever be worth \$75k, but that's around what a very clean one is going for at auction. I even saw a 1979 930 turbo with a whole bunch of different aftermarket performance and appearance parts (nothing extraordinary) and with over 150k miles sell for...\$115,000.00!!! Yikes!

If you've got the resources and you're looking for near supercar performance on a budget, get out and start shopping now!



Chilling ride



Another happy customer



Old School (E30 M3)



New School (1M)



The New Glen

by Mike Allen

Our annual Watkins Glen High Performance Driving Event is routinely a time for Mother Nature to do her best to ensure that farmlands in the Montour Falls area stay lush and green!

This year she tried her hardest, however, fortunately she was 24 hours early. Our routine Sunday morning drive from Long Island to the inimitable Falls Motel in Montour Falls started out with sunny, clear skies. Two-and-a-half hours into a five-hour trip, the skies opened up and folks rapidly learned the importance of good wiper blades, decent tires and the common sense to slow down to a manageable speed. Regardless, we were all smiles as we anticipated this and knew well that there was a favorable forecast for the ensuing Monday and Tuesday.

And disappointed, we were NOT!

Sixty students and thirty-four instructors had the long-awaited pleasure to experience the "new" Watkins Glen. "New" because the entire track had been resurfaced during the fall and winter. Gone were the slippery spots; gone were the slight imperfection from an aged surface; gone were the annoying "sealer filled" cracks. We were instead greeted with a grippy, smooth surface; improvements that altered braking zones, turn-in points, entry speeds and significantly increased exit speeds. This truly is a new track, one that induces confidence, with few surface irregularities and is a real joy to drive.

Our annual HPDE event at "The Glen" isn't only about driving, as there is a huge social aspect as well. It's a venue where folks from across the Northeast gather to talk cars, reminisce about what everyone's been doing since the prior year's event, smoke "nameless" cigars, share a few cold Red Stripe beers and just relax. That's what it's all about folks, driving and camaraderie.

For those who have not had the pleasure of driving the "New Watkins Glen", you may want to consider putting it on your bucket list.

Stay safe folks!!

Photos by Mike Allen



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True words



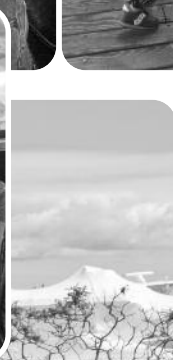
Never too old



Proper use of jack stands



Ready and getting ready for action





6th Annual

Dine & Shine

Déjà Vu all over again... Almost

by Steve Geraci

The last time we had a successful Dine & Shine was in 2012. 2013 was cancelled due to poor timing, 2014 was DOA, and 2015 was rained out. Well, we almost got rained out, but I decided we were NOT going to fail again. At first, the day did not look promising for the event, but most who pre-registered showed up and were treated to a spectacular day and a lot of fun.

Back in 2012, the event, which was similar to this year's with Pindar Winery for the Shine and Alure Restaurant for the Dine, was a great success. Because of this, I kept trying to duplicate that day, and on the 22nd of May 2016 it finally happened, only this time bigger and better than ever. I want to personally thank all of the Chapter members and my family and friends who came out to the North Fork of Long Island to be part of the day.

First stop, as usual, was Pindar Winery. Just an intimate group of about two dozen cars, drivers and families enjoying the morning as the sun broke through and warmed up the morning air. As everyone wandered around, I provided each driver with a written set of instructions ("Steve & Andy's Excellent Rally Adventure") on how to get to Alure Restaurant in Southold, only about seven miles away, which would take each car on a simple route with a set of about twenty questions, each answerable as you followed the route. In the meantime, I went ahead to the restaurant with my crew to await the arrival of the victims, umm, I mean members.

Some arrived at the restaurant unusually quick and some, it seemed, took forever to get there. While we awaited everyone's arrival, my team and I scored the clean car "Shine" segment of the event. In time, everyone arrived and we collected their rally score sheets and got to work determining who had won. Everyone settled in to enjoy lunch, the "Dine", under the tent on the deck at Alure Restaurant overlooking Peconic Bay and Shelter Island on a glorious afternoon. With all the results tabulated for both the clean car show and the rally, it was time to give out the awards.

All the winners of the clean car show were presented with a bottle of vintage Pindar Wine of their choice by our "Race Queen", my three year old granddaughter Cameron. Next, the fabulous awards for the rally, presented by yours truly. They included the "Fastest & First Arrival Award", presented to the car/driver who disregarded both the rally and speed limits – a working vintage 1972 Escort Radar Detector complete with case and power cord. Next, to the last car/driver, I presented the "Slowest & Last Arrival Award", a painted ceramic snail aptly named the "Silver Snail Award". Also, the Chapter provided some very tasteful BMW-authorized gifts for the first-, second-, and third-place teams with the most number of correct answers. Finally an award for the bonus question "How many tractors did you see along the route?"

All in all, it was a most excellent day.

Photos by Mike Allen and Darby Moses. More photos on page 19...

Spring Karting Event at OVRP

by Mike Sussman

We were fortunate that on Saturday, May 7th the sun was shining for our first outdoor karting event of the season. Participants enjoyed great racing at Oakland Valley Race Park, a fantastic facility. Casey Raskob got his daughter into a kart, and Barry Howell his son, to join in on a day of good, clean, competitive racing.

The day started with some open practice – participants were able to test the karts and learn the track. Tim Hannen from OVRP, who is also a loyal BMW enthusiast, had his E36 M3 track car on display. He was generous with information on the karts and allowed us extra time during the practice session to learn the track. After the practice session, we formed four groups of six drivers and the race began. Each driver had four races that lasted 12 minutes, plus about 15 minutes of open practice. As is tradition from prior events, we raced clean and treated the club karts with the utmost respect. Tim allowed us to test out four of his 125cc Rotax karts. If you have never driven one, well, I don't know quite how to explain it, but I highly recommend it.

I want to thank all who participated for working together with the track to make this a fun and safe event. A huge thank you to the race director Bobby at OVRP, Tim Hannen, Colleen Hannen, and the rest of the OVRP team for their hospitality. As the season winds down, if anyone has an interest in racing their own kart, taking a lesson or just wants to spend a fun day trying it out, reach out to the team at www.OVRP.net.

Photos by Darby Moses





BMW Performance Center Delivery

by Anthony Rescigno

I believe every BMW fan should make it a point to visit the Performance Center once in their life. I go every few years, but this time was extra special.

My father called me one Monday morning and says he ordered the now available comp pack f80, and the first thing I said was "PCD!" He said "What?" "Performance Center Delivery Dad! You have to!" In my opinion, if your going to order a 6MT comp pack with CF roof, you MUST at least do the Performance Center Delivery. True ballers do Euro delivery, but I knew I could only convince him to take a short flight to Spartanburg. He agreed and I waited patiently for our date. July 18th it was. Only five weeks away that felt like an eternity. I booked the flights, ordered him a new set of M driving gloves, and let BMW take care of the rest.

He called me every two-to-three days to say "Hey did you see that new review of the comp pack?" "Did you hear the exhaust?" "Should I order H&R's?" "Hey I ordered H&R's, oh and a slew of CF goodies." "Don't tell Mom!"

I couldn't stop thinking about the trip and how excited I was for my dad. This is his first true M car. He has dreamed of

owning an M3 since his E30 325 when he was 26. He has had an 6MT M235, M Sport F10 535 6MT, e46 ZHP 6MT Sedan, and about five or six other BMWs in-between. He has been a lifelong, diehard BMW owner. He truly deserves this car and I couldn't wait to see the smile on his face when he took delivery.

From the moment we landed, service was world class. We were lucky enough to get Andy and Laura as our BMW Performance Center instructors. They truly care about making your experience unforgettable. The day started with classroom time instructed by Andy and then right onto the skidpad for some beautiful controlled slides. Then onto some late braking techniques and finally hot laps on their short course.

Before taking delivery, Laura graciously handed us a thrilling route home, which included the best driving roads on the Blue Ridge Parkway. The BMW Performance Center staff gave us a day we will never forget. Thank you BMW!

Welcome to our New Members!

Michael Abriano	Christopher DeSanto	Alvin Llewellyn	Chris Sakellaris
Zafar Adilov	Amy Dilks	Melinda Lugay	Richard Scalia
Stuart Alper	Zhishu Ding	Epharim Lugo	Kurt Seidman
Sardil Anam	Jeffrey Donegan	Cel Lumbera	Neil Shapiro
Khalid Anam	Roy Dowdell	Kyle Ma	Naveed Sheikh
Evangelos Angelides	Vitaliy Dubinskiy	Bryan McCay	Yuriy Shteinbuk
Andres Armesto	Jennifer Easton	Stephen McGann	Seth Siegel
Scott Bachrach	William Eng	William McIntyre	Robert Siegelberg
Christian Balmaceda	Jonathan Fay	Clifford McNatt	Sebastian Sim
Brenden Banks	Brandon Ferrara	David McNerney	Justin Sinclair
Eugene Barnosky	Alan Fishman	Lauren Menchini	Dan Slivjanovski
Reginald Barrett	Stratis Frangos	Diego Merino	Peter Strifas
Charles Barsella	Gilda Gaertner	Susan Metz	Balamurugan Subbarayan
Mark Beiderman	Steve Galiotos	Richard Mingo	K Taipale
Mark Bergamini	Kathleen George	Bruce Mirkin	Ryan Taliercio
Eddie Berger	Victor Gonzalez	Townsend Montant	Wade Taylor
Steven Bitondo	Robert Grant	Nicol Moore	Joe Tedesco
Danilo Brioso	Kevin Gray	Joe Negron	Chris Thomas
Henry Broggi	Steve Greiner	John Ospitale	Calvin Thomas
Orhys Brown	Konstantine Gritsai	John Palermo	Sean Thomas-Moore
Matthew Brown	Gary Harding	Howard Paley	Jeffrey Tiesi
Mirza Bulic	Emilio Harris	Sunandan Pandya	Andrew Tomais
David Bush	Ferenc Herczeg	Douglas Paquette	Daniel Turetsky
Antonio Camacho	Jeffrey Herman	Michael Pasqualina	Rose Valentin
Dan Capossela	Gregory Hines	Kathy Pecorella	Nathaniel Ward
Gregory Cashman	Adam Hurly	Christopher Peloso	Kenneth Wong
Morris Chang	Dilshod Islamov	Marusia Popovech	Kelvin Wong
Deepak Chiminyan	Wayne Jackson	Ross Porpora	James Wong
Taeyoung Choi	Michael Jo	Joshua Prevost	Benjamin Wong
Val Choumitsky	Keyan Jordan	Leonard Prlesi	Zheyu Xu
Alexandra Choumitsky	Martha Kalish	Alan Randmae	Dean Yep
Wyndham Chow	James Kilmetis	Robert Ranheim	Hon Yim
John Coffen	Alexander King	Krishna Reddy	Shimingyan Yu
Christine Coira	Jeffrey Kinsey	Roy Reynolds	Jonathan Yu
Bruno Costa	Lex Kirichek	Decklan Richardson	Charalampos Zervos
Keith Costello	Robert Klayn	Craig Rogers	Geng Zhe
Douglas Crisp	Magnus Krantz	John Ross	Steven Zizic
Dennis Deljanin	Daniel Kufel	Jaime Ross	Val Zoubarev
Leonard Denicker	Steve Larit	George Ryabov	
Joseph Deninno	Herman Ling	Andre Rytel	

And a salute to our long standing members!

Anniversary milestones for members who joined between April and June

5th Anniversary

Jeffrey Bennett
Matthew Bernhard
James Breen
Waldemar Bronowicz
Marti Gallardo
William Hempel
Andy Hong
Timothy Kong

Anthony Kuczewski

John Kuczewski
Augie Lacorazza
Jackson Ma
Alex Macfarlane
Jeffrey Markowitz
Eduardo Nau
Christopher Owles
John Perrone

Kennett Rawson

Michael Rhorer
Noah Rifkin
Justin Rook
Lyudmila Shulman
Mario Smith
Michael Stewart
Greg Sullivan
Anish Sundaresh

10th Anniversary

Alvin Baugh
Megan Britton
Sean Carroll
Edward Filkowski
David Fong
Daniel Frank
Davide Gogliormella
Marcus Gutzler

Barrington Howell

Lisa Hunter
Sharon Intilli
Peter Klimczak
John Lamorte
Michael Lee
David Martin
Carolann Moritz
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Rick Okula
Fred Rondina
Jeffrey Spar
Phillip Tiongson
Anselm Wong
James Zanetti
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Dimitrios Antonakis
Stanley Bassen
Larry Burd
Peter Burke
Robert Candella
Lawson Douglas
Robert Gottlieb
Burt Hurvich
Albert Lee
Adam Levine
Walter Markes
Joe Menechino
David Morehouse
Peter Nettesheim
George Niwinsky
Charles O'Donnell
Michael Otten
Christopher Pirigyi
Ira Rook
Scott Sanders
David Schroedel

Ken Schultz
Charlene Schultz
Cindy Skow
Gary Slobin
Jan van der Baan
Anthony Velazquez
Ron Vogl
Leonid Yagnatovsky
Feng Yang
20th Anniversary
Rose Ann Burke
Joshua Findlay
Gregory Ialenti
Chuck Moss
Peter Schwab
25th Anniversary
Chas Cancellare
Kenneth Wong
30th Anniversary
Steven Burger
Cliff Eberhard
Henry Meehan
Aldo Pinotti
35th Anniversary
Bruce Barber
John Mayo

Over 40 Years!
Peter Alp
Wm Bormann
Steven Cappel
John Damtoft
Neal Feldman
Burton Fleming
Steve Geraci

Charles Greenel
Bill Hedberg
Christopher McGuiness
Seymour Mogal
Raymond Nickel
John Schroeder
Karl Topp

45 Years!!
Stuart Rosenthal

2017 Call for Nominations for the New York Chapter Board

Open Positions: President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary.

Members interested in running must be nominated by a member in good standing. Include a short statement supporting the nomination and mail to: New York BMW CCA, PO Box 102, Williston Park, NY 11596 or via email: nominations@nybmwcca.org.

Candidates for President and Treasurer must have prior service as a member of the Board of Directors in order to be eligible to serve.

Nominations must be received no later than October 10, 2016.

New York Chapter BMW CCA By-Laws can be downloaded here:
<http://www.nybmwcca.org/bylaws>

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EuroMeccanica, Inc. was started by Michael Shiffer in 1991. Michael is a tech advisor for NYBMWCCA and EuroMeccanica hosts their annual Beach Party, where dozens of BMW owners and enthusiasts converge to learn more about their cars. The shop's atmosphere is warm and open. Questions and input from our customers are welcome, and we make every effort to explain what we are doing to your car, and why.



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- Fuel cell installation
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Ramblings of a MINIac

by Peter Burke

Who thought I'd fall in love!

standard form with just battery power, which, in the best conditions, can give a range of about 80 miles. The model I drove was equipped with the REx, a two-cylinder gas generator that will charge the battery and extend total range up to 150 miles. I was driving south on the Seaford Oyster Bay Expressway when the REx engaged. When I exited I had to really listen for the generator. The transition was seamless.



Let me preface with I know this is a column about MINIs in a BMW car club magazine, but recently I saw an offer on LinkedIn to take part in a three day "extended test drive" of the BMW i3. As I write this piece I am in the middle of a second extended test drive. To be honest, I never thought I would be smitten by an electric car. When I first saw an i3 during a MINI event in Freeport I thought it was an interesting concept at the best.

Driving the i3 requires one to take a step back and reassess their driving techniques. When the driver takes their foot off the accelerator pedal, the car begins to slow down much more rapidly than in a conventional auto due to the regenerative braking system. Another strange feature of the i3 is the relative lack of noise produced by the vehicle. I opened both windows while driving the i3 through town and the car is silent when driving at speeds below 30 miles an hour!

Performance of the i3 is amazing. 0-60 is reached within 7.5 seconds. The power is delivered in a smooth linear feel. There is no gear shifting or hesitation, plus the BMW DNA means the i3 can be maneuvered through traffic with the greatest of ease. The turning circle is very tight too. The i3 comes in

I encourage BMW CCA members to try the i3 – it really is a technological masterpiece. I wish to thank Steve Mahoney of Freeport MINI and Justin at Freeport BMW for my i3 experience. And a shout-out to BMW Bay Shore for helping with my second test drive.

On Sunday, September 25th the annual Great Marques of Long Island takes place at Old Westbury Gardens sponsored by our own BMW CCA chapter. Until next time, see you out there!

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TechTalk with Mike Shiffer

You are motoring along, thinking about work, love, baseball. The music is on, the traffic is light and the destination is not far. All is well.

Or maybe you are heading to the airport, running late, in heavy traffic with a twitchy passenger who's obsessing about missing the flight. Nerves are frayed.

Then you become aware of an amber warning light on the instrument cluster. It says, "Check Engine", or "Service Engine Soon", or is simply the outline of an iconic

engine. Your heart leaps into your throat, and all other considerations become irrelevant as you contemplate the possible failure of your vehicle to take you where you must go.

In other words, this light generates a lot of anxiety. In my (shaken-but-not-stirred) belief that accurate information is the best treatment for nebulous fear, I offer this column. In the interest of brevity (and not boring you all to tears), I have simplified some of the descriptions. This has the additional benefit of giving the gearheads among you the opportunity to cavil, nitpick and pettifog.

The Check Engine Light (hereinafter, CEL) is found on every car sold in the US since the 1990s. It is part of the OBDII protocol for on-board diagnostic information which can be read by generic code readers, as well as by inspection machines in states that have vehicle emission standards. The light's function is to alert the driver to conditions detected by the engine management computer that may affect driveability or emissions. It may be accompanied by a change in vehicle performance, or it may not. It is an amber light because it does NOT call for shutting down the car as soon as safely possible. That is what a red light means: overheating, no battery charging, no oil pressure, e.g. (They may or may not be accompanied by the CEL.) Like the amber lights which let you know a bulb is out or some fluid is low, it tells you something is going on which is important but not urgent.

In order to know what turned on the CEL, codes must be read by a computer plugged into the car's diagnostic port. Any OBDII reader can pull codes, but BMW-specific software can get more detailed information, as well as run tests to pinpoint any problems.

There are hundreds of conditions that set codes which turn on the CEL (as well as problems that set codes without calling for the light). Here are the most common ones, in no particular order:

1. Evaporative emissions and secondary air injection

Evap codes are set when the system that monitors the integrity of the plumbing which contains fumes from the gas tank detects a leak or other problems. Loose and missing gas caps will set evap codes. Secondary air injection forces air into a cold exhaust system to warm up the catalytic converters faster. If low or no flow is detected, a code is set.

Any failure in either of these systems will set a code that will light up the CEL. This is usually the only sign that anything is wrong, as it is extremely rare for either system to affect the way the engine runs, whether they are working properly or not.

2. Fuel/air mixture control, usually lean condition

Engines run by burning air and fuel in a ratio of about 15/1 by weight. That ratio must be kept between narrow limits for power, economy and cleanliness. The engine management (DME) meters the fuel based mainly on the amount of air the engine is drawing into its combustion chambers. Any air leak between the sensor that measures that air demand and the intake port means that unmeasured air is being burned. This throws off the DME's calculations, often enough to set a code and turn on the CEL. The DME also modifies its fuel delivery based on the feedback it gets from the oxygen sensors in the exhaust upstream of the catalytic converters. These tell the DME how clean the exhaust is based on the oxygen content in the exhaust gas. If the oxy sensors say the car is running too lean (too much air) and the DME is near the upper limit of its fuel delivery map, a mixture code will be set that lights up the CEL.

If the CEL comes on for a mixture problem due to an air leak or a faulty component, there may be some fall-off in power and smoothness, or not, depending on the severity of the problem.

3. Catalytic converter efficiency

Cats burn anything the engine doesn't, turning the exhaust gasses into carbon dioxide and water and very little else. If they don't convert virtually all of the free oxygen that makes it out of the engine, the downstream oxy sensors report this fact to the DME, which sets a code for cat efficiency. Catalysts do go bad, but downstream oxy sensor failure and exhaust leakage can set the same codes.

CEL for cat efficiency is almost never accompanied by driveability problems.

4. Water pump failure/thermostat failure

Many BMWs now have an electric water pump instead of a belt-driven one. The DME controls and monitors its speed. If the pump spins too slowly or stops, the CEL will come on. So will the electric engine fan. If you have a lit CEL and your car sounds like an airplane, get to a shop ASAP. You are about to overheat.

Your BMW most likely has a thermostat with an electrical plunger that allows the DME to adjust the circulation of coolant through the radiator. The plunger can jam, which triggers the CEL. This rarely causes other symptoms.

5. Vanos/Valvetronic failures

Like many other manufacturers, BMW got jiggy with valve timing awhile back. Changing when valves open and close improves both power and economy, at the expense of simplicity. To their credit, BMW's Vanos units have gotten simpler over time. Valvetronics uses intake valve lift to control engine speed, all but eliminating the need for a throttle butterfly. Being practical folk, BMW engineers have left the conventional throttle body in place, and the car uses it on start-up, and if the Valvetronic fails. A CEL lit up for problems with Vanos or Valvetronics will usually be accompanied by a noticeable fall-off in performance.

6. Misfires

The DME keeps count of how often a cylinder misfires, i.e., fails to accelerate the crank when its turn comes. If a particular cylinder misfires too often, its fuel injector will be taken out of service for the remainder of the drive cycle and the CEL will flash, then stay on. There will be a loss of power and smoothness. If the engine is stopped and restarted after 10 seconds or so, the cylinder's injector will be brought back into service and the car may run normally for a while. The CEL may or may not stay on.

A small pile of notes:

Even though it has its own warning light, the transmission control can also call for the CEL. This isn't common on BMWs.

Turbocharged cars will usually limit boost or cut it out entirely if there are fuel mixture codes set. This is to protect the engine from detonation which can destroy it rather quickly.

Diesels share many issues with gasoline cars, but also have some of their very own. My experience with BMW Diesel engines is limited, so I'll keep quiet about them for now.

If you live around here, you must have a yearly state inspection which includes an emissions test. Inspection stations no longer read the actual exhaust emissions. Instead, they rely on the car's own computer to keep tabs on itself. If your CEL is on, your car won't pass inspection.

To sum up, you need to take the CEL seriously, but not panic over it. Get the codes read as soon as possible. Keep in mind that although any OBDII reader can pull useful information, BMW-specific programs are far more effective in helping us diagnose what's gone wrong, and why. 🚗

Michael Shiffer | EuroMeccanica, Inc.
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6th Annual Dine & Shine at Pindar Winery

Photo by Steve Geraci