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B10 3.5. It's based on the kind of 535i you can see anywhere, complete with a strong M30 engine that will not break. About the worst you might find is a dicky camshaft which the sensible would replace with an equivalent Schrick or Piper. And maybe the head gasket might go, but it's a standard BMW gasket and changing it is the same weekend nuts-and-bolts job as any other 535i. Shock absorbers are Bilsteins which you can buy from Euro Car parts, and although Alpina exhausts aren't cheap, you'll get a custom system made for less than the cost of a genuine one.

So, despite its Bi-Turbo looks and 150 mph pace, the Alpina B10 is, in my book, the ultimate useable 5-Series. You can buy a clean one for £4500 and run it on a real-world budget.

The story of the Alpina begins with this very car, as it is build plaque number B10 3.5/1, which means it's the first one that Sytner sold. The E34 5-Series replaced the E28 in January 1988 with a UK launch the following June. British cars came without a catalyst but all German-market cars had one to meet new German emissions regulations that came into force in January 1989. The E34 B10 as built by Alpina and Sytner at the end of 1988 took the recipe from the previous E28 B10 and transferred it to the new, heavier



shell. The engine was based on the 3430cc M30 big six, as used in the M535i, 635CSi and 735i from late 1982, and added a gas-flowed head with opened-out chambers and ports, bigger inlet valves, higher compression Mahle pistons plus a spiky cam and better exhaust system.

Power was 260 bhp in the E28, but the catalyst fitted to all German market E34 B10s and the later British ones was down to 254 bhp. Torque dropped by 15 lbf.ft to 225 lbf.ft.

Non-catalyst cars like this early one still had the full 260 bhp, however, which means a maximum speed of over 150 mph and a 0-60 time in the high sixes, performance which is very close to the 3.6-litre M5.

Although marginally slower than the previous B10, the new one handled a lot better than the previous E28 — well, maybe not better, but safer on the limit. The E28 was from the tail-out school of motoring and many 5-Series owners felt that, as nice as the new car was, it wasn't as electric as the old M535i which used to feel almost savagely fast.

As usual, Alpina had a well-known performance spring manufacturer wind some coils and Bilstein made the dampers which were those from the 535i Sport with a little bit more stiffness on the rebound. Anti-roll bars were thicker too and the result was a superb-handling car which even today is quite something. Electronic driver aids are all very well but the serious driver believes they take something away.

Wheels were still the classic 20 spokes but were raised in size from the E28's 16 inch diameter to 17 inches with 8.5 inch wide front wheels wearing 235/45 tyres and 9.5 inch wide rears with massive 265/40s. Retaining the standard 535i sport bodykit, the new B10 was further marked out by the special Alpina instruments and steering wheel, plus the side stripes and badges. Oh, and an LSD as well.

The story of Craig Sterry's B10 is quite a simple one, for he only bought it at the >



Tech Spec

Engine

Alpina 260 bhp 3430cc engine, standard M30 but with bigger inlet valves in reworked head, Mahle high compression pistons, tubular exhaust manifold and free flow exhaust plus remapped ECU

Transmission

Five-speed Getrag overdrive gearbox and limited slip differential

Suspension

Standard 535i but with revalved Bilstein dampers, shorter, harder springs and fatter anti-roll bars

Brakes

Standard 535i

Wheels & Tyres

20-spoke Alpina wheels, 17 inch diameter, 8.5 inch wide fronts with 235/45 Fulda Extremo tyres, 9.5 inch rears with 265/40 tyres

Body

Standard B10 with Sport bodykit and Alpina front spoiler

Interior

Grey cloth trim with electric Recaro seats, Alpina steering wheel and gearknob, plus Alpina instruments and build plaque

When he told me the build plaque number — Number One — I just had to have it



By Alpina standards the interior of this B10 is restrained with just the trademark wheel, dials and gearknob.



The 'BIO' number plate came with the car. Build plaque reveals Craig's car to be build number one.

535i? "It's the most complete car I've ever driven," he reckons. "The handling is superb and it goes hard in a very torquey way. On the runway at Bruntingthorpe Proving Ground it pulled 140 mph from a standing start, but it'll do over 150 mph. At speed the car feels very composed and what you put into it, you get back. It flatters inexperienced drivers."

Condition-wise, it's what you'd expect for a 15-year-old BMW, which is pretty good. Craig bought this car to keep for a long time, so a restoration is planned including some

bodywork, a repaint and a black leather retrim to bring the car back to new condition.

"I'm very impatient with cars. When I want something done, I want it done yesterday. I intended to get this bodywork done the moment I got it, but I've been out every day just driving it about for the hell of it, so it's had to wait a few weeks more. It's reawakened my passion for driving," says Craig.

Yes, 15 years on and an old Alpina can still do that to mortal man — surely the best advert there is? ○

beginning of July. Craig is a moderator on www.e36Coupe.com and for a living he sells TVs and HiFi systems for Sevenoaks Sound and Vision in Swansea. Before this, Craig had a couple of 3-Series, and a 520i. "That wasn't a bad car. My E21 320 was rear-ended by a bus and so I spent a couple of weeks looking for a good 520i," he explains. "I added an M5 front spoiler and M5 suspension to it as well as Breyton wheels. It was a manual version but it just wasn't fast enough."

Fate dealt a hand with that great daytime distraction, eBay, where this Alpina just never made its reserve. "I got the guy's e-mail address and after the auction had finished, I sent him a mail asking if I could buy it," says Craig. "I'd always fancied owning one of these and when he told me the build plaque number — Number One — I just had to have it."

But what does he think of the car? Overrated M5 imposter? Or just a jumped-up

