

the same as the CS/CSi coupe.



lighter and retaining similar spring rates. In fact, the coupe body with its thin pillars (and no central pillar) was not particularly rigid. Yet their attractive styling and practicality gave them great appeal. They were grand tourers with surprisingly few rivals. The large Mercedes coupes seem cumbersome and compromised in comparison, while the Porsche 911 demanded much

larger 3.0-liter carbs or Bosch coupes came designed to ma
As always acquired a spe excitement ge

SORTING OUT THE CSLs

BMW built 1,000 "standard" 3.0 CSLs and 39 "Batmobiles," right? Wrong. In fact, there are many more "Batmobiles" than you'd think, and the so-called standard CSL came in three distinct variations.

The first cars—announced in May 1971—were real stripped-for-action road racers: thinner body panels; no front bumper; fiberglass rear bumper; racing latches on the hood; manual winding side windows, made from Plexiglas; and, of course, the alloy-skinned opening panels, all in the name of weight reduction. BMW even skimped on underbody rust protection and sound deadening. Along with some drastically cheaper interior trim, including thin carpets and lightweight Scheel bucket seats, 400 pounds were paired off the coupe. While the top speed wasn't much affected, acceleration was decisively quicker. The suspension was stiffened by Bilstein gas shocks with advanced progressive-rate springs, and the wheels were fat Alpina 7-inch alloys with chrome wheel arch extensions to keep them legal. Black accent stripes distinguished the *Leichtmetall* from the standard CS/CSi. The company built 169, all with left-hand drive. Originally fitted with the 2,985-cc carbureted in-line six, giving 180 horsepower, a slight bore increase in August 1972 gave 3,003 cc, which allowed the CSL to slip into 3.0-liter Group 2 competition. At the same time,

Bosch electronic injection replaced the twin Zenith carbs, and power rose to 200 horsepower. Brochures of the time quote a carburetor-fed 3,003-cc engine too. Just over 500 are reputed to have been built.

The British-specification right-hand-drive car was introduced in the United Kingdom in October 1972 and came with an "RHD City package" to appease fat-cat Brits who wanted the lightweight racer cache with none of the discomfort. Alloy panels, chrome wheel arch extensions, and bucket seats remained, but the United Kingdom CSL had proper bumpers, undercoating and sound deadening, standard coupe carpets, and even proper glass side windows, tinted and electrically operated. Power steering (sometimes with the standard 3.0-liter wheel, otherwise a sports alloy spoked job) returned too, as did softer CS suspension. The hood could be unlocked from inside the glove box, as on the all-steel CSL, although it was still manually propped rather than counter-balanced. The British importers (a separate operation from the factory in those days) took 500 CSLs and dropped the ordinary CSi at the same time, reckoning that buyers looking for the ultimate in BMW performance would take the lightweight, and lazy drivers the automatic, carburetor-engined CSa. In fact, the CSL was a slow seller. Prices were high—more than an Aston or

Jensen—
bucket s
alloy pan
British ba



carbs or Bosch injection. Alongside the new 3.0-liter coupes came the CSL (see sidebar), a homologation special designed to make the marque stronger in competition.

As always with BMW, the limited production CSL acquired a special cache due to its relative rarity and the excitement generated by its alleged lightweight character.

that shipped to a fair proportion of CSL production, particularly many of the cars that went to the United Kingdom, were still fitted with some of the heavier interior features like electric windows. Mechanically they remained similar to the standard CSi. Engines were allegedly given fractional bore increases

Jensen—and not everybody liked the awkward-to-get-into Scheel bucket seats or wanted to be bothered with the easily damaged alloy panels. The CSi reappeared before long and the last of the British batch of CSLs was sold in August 1974.



The 3.2 liter CSL—"Batmobile" to you and me—was announced in August 1973. It was left-hand drive only and had a bigger 3.2-liter (actually 3,153-cc) 206-horsepower engine to homologate the 84-millimeter stroke used on the 3.5-liter works racing coupe. It was still badged 3.0-liter.

The car used the lightweight shell (initially available only in Polar silver or Chamonix white with optional motorsport stripes) as before, with alloy doors and bonnet, but—to take the weight and downforce of the rear wing—the trunk lid was steel with fitting for the spoiler. And yes, the spoiler (or racing kit) was packed away in the trunk on cars sold in West Germany, where such appendages were never legal. There was a deep front spoiler, a roof hoop spoiler just above the rear window, a small lip spoiler on the edge of the bootlid, and rubber "splitters" on the front fenders. Lighter single-plate side glass was used and—like the previous German-spec CSLs—"Batmobiles" had fixed rear quarter windows. Manual steering and Bilstein gas-pressure shocks with three alternative levels of hardness meant that the 3.2-liter CSL didn't need an anti-roll bar.

Around 100 of these cars were built, but not all had their racing kits fitted, and owners could opt for the "town kit" with standard bumpers, softer suspension, and even air conditioning if required.

There was a last batch—built in 1974–1975—of unofficial series two "Batmobiles" with minor differences like a three-fin rear bat-wing and a driver's seat with an adjustable backrest. Fifty-six of these were built.



For the collector, the "Batmobile" CSL is the ultimate prize. Only a handful were built using the "standard" CSL as a base but with flamboyant aerodynamic aids.

to bring them up to 3,003 cc in order to move them into a competition class where victories were more likely. Whether this increase was a real one, or whether it merely represented an increase in the tolerance declared for the purposes of homologation remains an open question. Later, a more substantial increase in stroke brought them up to 3,153 cc.

This was the era in which motorsport once again looked to aerodynamics for competitive advantage. This time, however, designers looked not just for a slippery shape, but for means to generate downforce to aid vehicle grip and handling at high speeds. Formula One cars of the period became festooned with large, high-mounted wings. The CanAm cars of the period used various airfoils and skirts in addition to large wings in an attempt to minimize drag and maximize downforce.

BMW followed suit in the early 1970s with its race CSL coupes, which quickly became known as "Batmobiles" as a result of the fins and wings they began to sprout. Most distinctive were two longitudinal fins along the front fenders, along with a very large rear spoiler suspended from two sideplates.

These very visible features attracted notice but perhaps more important was the range of competition equipment that BMW Motorsport developed. These speed goodies included a 24-valve cylinder head and a special crank without the extensive counterweighting featured on production models.

Most manufacturers of this period had motorsport divisions producing homologation specials and a wide range of exotic performance equipment. You could buy exotic alloy eight-port heads for Minis,

torsport was to have in manufacturers' marketing plans. The extent of modifications available at this time was extensive, and anyone believing that the racing CSL of the mid-to-late 1970s bore much relation

The CSL coupes initially were not strong competitors, but after development they began to score some success in Europe by 1973, and later in the United States. Both Alpina and Schnitzer ran coupes

she wanted to be that much of a showoff. Note the plastic bumpers and chrome wheel arch extensions.



with its race CSL
n as "Batmobiles"
began to sprout.
nal fins along the
e rear spoiler sus-

acted notice but
ge of competition
developed. These
linder head and a
counterweighting

riod had motor-
ion specials and a
equipment. You
heads for Minis,