



BMW LS Coupé – the end of an era

On the face of it, there is little reason why “BMW” and “small car” should ever appear in the same sentence. Over the past 40 years, the Bavarian brand has developed into a premium manufacturer of refined and dynamic automobiles with an undisputed place among the global elite. Indeed, if the Isetta is the first model that comes to mind when you think of the Munich-based carmaker, you’d have to be something of a classic car enthusiast. And yet small cars played a key role in the history of BMW between the 1920s and mid-1960s, as a number of charming and fascinating models can testify.

By Walter Zeichner

Nobody exploring the beginnings of automotive construction at BMW in 1929 could ignore the 3/15 PS, a small car typical of its time and popularly known as the “Dixi”. Despite the wide-

spread economic hardship of the late 1920s, the 15 horsepower model was a great success – not least on account of its innovative all-steel body. The Dixi was the precursor to a stream of “real”

cars, six-cylinder models which laid the foundations for the brand’s worldwide reputation today.

In 1955, with the previously healthy postwar motorcycle business running



Press photo of the BMW LS Coupé in front of Schloss Nymphenburg, Munich.

line, making this the most successful BMW model series yet. The 700 was available with one powerplant only – the motorcycle-derived Boxer engine with displacement of around 700 cc and developing 30, 32 or 40 bhp. The company even launched a convertible version of the car in 1961.

The last of BMW's small cars

A thorough model series upgrade in the spring of 1962 added 16 cm to the saloon's wheelbase and 32 cm to its overall length. Even the model designation BMW 700 was dropped; the small four-seater was now badged as the BMW LS and available in a standard or luxury version. The original idea was to fit the LS with a small rear-mounted four-cylinder engine, but the prevailing trend towards larger cars and the growing success of the new BMW 1500 mid-range model persuaded the company to abandon the concept, and the small car segment altogether, for the medium term.

The BMW 700 Coupé remained in production, albeit in post-1959 short-wheelbase guise, with a choice of 32 or 40 bhp engines. The small 2+2 with short wheelbase continued to roll off the assembly line until May 1964, enough time to complete another extremely successful chapter in BMW's motor racing history. The company decided that a longer version with the wheelbase of the LS should follow in the tyre tracks of the "short-tail coupé" as a means of using up surplus parts. However, expenditure on BMW's final small car had to be kept within tight and justifiable limits.

Experienced Stuttgart-based body manufacturer Baur was once again entrusted with the job of conjuring up a practical solution. The Swabian craftsmen had already left their seal of quality on the beguiling BMW 700 Cabrio, but this time their task was far trickier. For cost reasons, Baur was asked to use not only the window and roof construction of the short-wheelbase Coupé, but also the front section and doors. With the rear section of the body taken from the LS Saloon, the engineers were left with the job of somehow absorbing all the extra length into the finned rear of the

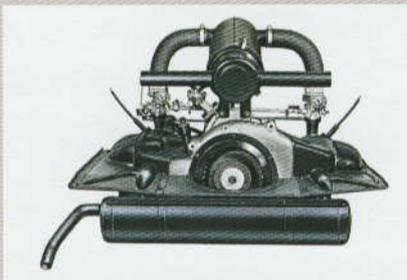
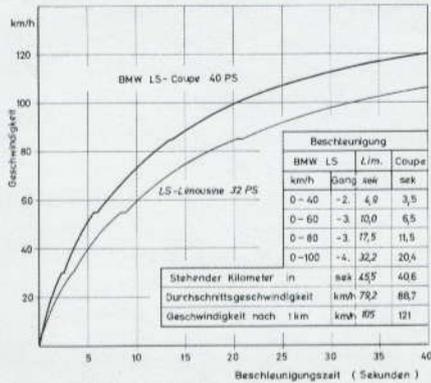
out of gas, BMW seized upon the brilliant Italian Isetta concept for its next move. The Isetta was subsequently moulded into a weather-proof small car tailored perfectly to the requirements of thousands of motorbike converts. For many BMW drivers, this intriguing vehicle spawned a lasting affinity with the brand.

The arrival of the Isetta coincided with the spread of the economic miracle in Germany. With this dramatic upturn in national wealth, it soon became obvious that the country had outgrown the Isetta as a basic automotive package. In 1957 BMW introduced the 600, the "big Isetta", a mixture of small car and mini-van, packed full of original ideas but lacking in prestige and with little appeal in

the eyes of the increasingly discerning car-driving public. The 700 changed all that. Launched in 1959 and marrying a classic saloon-car design with Italian style, this series of small saloons and coupés proved an enormous hit with customers who could only afford a small car but still liked the idea of standing out from the crowd in a BMW. Despite having only two-cylinder engines, these models were in the same price category as the much more spacious four-cylinder Volkswagen Beetle. However, the baby Beemers had a touch of chic, blended with that dash of sporting prowess that drivers expected of the brand.

In production until 1965, a total of 188,121 units rolled off the assembly

Twin Boxer engine



The flat-twin Boxer engine with twin carburetors delivered 40 bhp to ensure sporty progress for the lightweight BMW Coupés.

car. Necessity proved to be the mother of an extremely distinctive, but rather disjointed, design. No matter, the powers that be decided the new Coupé was ready to be unveiled to the public.

The longer body and a significantly more luxurious interior raised the weight of the small Coupé by nearly 50 kilograms, which meant that only the 40 bhp sports engine with twin carburettor could provide the necessary power. More comfortable seats with imitation leather edging and fabric centre sections, a dashboard with wood effect trim and full carpet covering for the floor areas altered the whole complexion of the longer BMW Coupé, giving it an extra dose of class and luxury. The car was priced at 5,850 marks – no less expensive than the more homogeneous 700 CS which went before it.

The motley collection of parts otherwise known as the BMW LS Coupé was launched in September 1964, the designation reflecting its family links

with the longer Saloon. Reaction to the new model was decidedly muted, the unavoidable stylistic concessions simply too stark for the public's taste. A sprawling curved rear window attempted to bridge the extended distance between the rear edge of the roof and the engine cover, while generous chrome trim on the rear lip and a ventilation grille were intended to add further refinement.

Targeting women

In the words of the original press release for the BMW LS Coupé, issued in late September 1964: "...The new sports variant – the LS Coupé – has now gone into production, rounding off the 700 range. The streamlined form and functional, elegant interior of the alluring Coupé comes with all the features of the popular LS Luxus. It is a car which will strike a chord with the ladies in particular. It is comfortable, looks good and can be steered effortlessly by female drivers..."

As for the paintwork for the BMW LS Coupé, the most popular shades were Cream, Bordeaux red, Guyana blue and Fjord grey, with a small number of cars also ordered in other colours such as Florida and, towards the end of the production run, Chamonix white.

Somewhat rough around the edges it may have been, but the LS Coupé was brimming with charm and character. With its outstanding, sports-tuned chassis and impressively lightweight

construction, the 680 kg LS followed in the dynamic tradition of its predecessor. The speedometer gave a top speed of 140 km/h, while acceleration from 0 to 100 km/h took just under 20 seconds – underwhelming by today's standards but eye-catching figures for a small car in the 1960s.

Although the BMW 700 had very much entered the twilight of its highly successful racing career, the "long-tail coupé" still made the odd appearance at mostly regional racing events. However, it never quite touched the heights experienced by the short-wheelbase Sports Coupé.

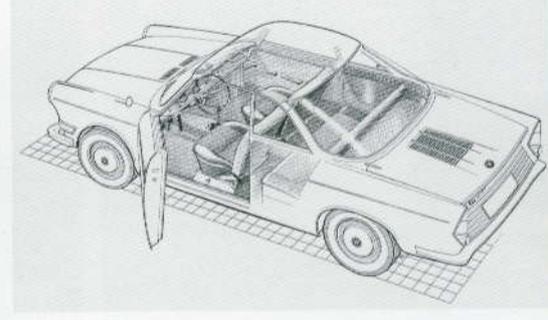
After just a single year in production, the LS Coupé was pulled off the assembly line in September 1965, usurped by BMW's glittering new executive-class model. The 2000 CS Coupé was fitted with a state-of-the-art body produced by Osnabrück-based manufacturer Karmann and powered by a silky smooth fuel-injected engine devel-

Kennen Sie das BMW LS Coupé?

Schlank und rassig präsentiert sich dieses elegante, sportliche Coupé mit der langgestreckten Heckpartie und der großen, gewölbten Scheibe. Über die gediegene Ausstattung und die technischen Einzelheiten informiert Sie gern Ihr BMW Händler.

One of only few advertisements for the rare BMW LS Coupé of 1964.





Wood-effect dashboard and plenty of chrome in keeping with sixties style.

opening 120 bhp. The bold embodiment of the brand's wholesale change of direction, the 2000 CS brought the curtain down on a fascinating era in the history of BMW car making. The company would now focus exclusively on building cars aimed at the most discerning of customers.

Edging towards obscurity

BMW produced just 1,730 units of the LS Coupé, making it the smallest-vol-

ume body variant in the brand's 107 series of 700 cc small cars. From the outset, almost half of the models built were delivered to customers outside Germany. Drivers in Belgium and Holland were particularly receptive to the unorthodox charms of the small BMW, but the LS Coupé also had its fans in France and Italy. One example was even shipped to Sao Paulo. The last of the production run, a Bordeaux red model with chassis number 181730,

was sent on its way to Holland in September 1965.

The BMW LS Coupé is another of those cars from the relatively recent past which have slipped almost entirely from the public consciousness, an unknown quantity outside a niche group of specialists. Indeed, no more than perhaps two dozen examples are thought to have survived the near 40 years since this unique automobile first took to the roads.

