



Sustainable driving

Bob Arora drives the electric BMW i3.

The car I have had the pleasure of driving this month is the BMW i3, courtesy of Lloyd BMW Newcastle.

With the price of petrol only going one way, it was only a matter of time before manufacturers looked at alternative power sources.

When diesel engines were first introduced, people predicted they would never sell as they were slow and very noisy but recent technological achievements have made diesel-powered cars not only economical but also extremely refined.

A few cars I have been lucky enough to drive recently are exempt from road tax as they are so efficient.

Before everyone jumped on the electric bandwagon, the only electric powered vehicles around were either milk floats or mobility scooters! One of the first all electric cars to be launched in the UK was the Nissan Leaf. In the states the Tesla has been a sales phenomenon and it was only a matter of time before BMW introduced a premium electric car.

After seven years of development, BMW have finally launched this cool looking car. I drove the i3 with a range extender, which has both electric power and the added benefit of a small petrol engine.

The addition of the petrol engine should stop potential owners electric range anxiety. The car is fitted with a two-cylinder engine linked to a 9-litre fuel tank.

The i3's passenger cell is carbonfibre and the batteries and motors are below the floor. The car has a low centre of gravity along with BMW's trademark 50/50 weight distribution. The minimal noise levels make the cabin a very soothing environment. BMW have used adventurous materials and thankfully they don't look or feel cheap at all.



The car's cabin space is great thanks to clever styling; the car will seat four adults with ease.

The rear doors won't open unless you have opened the front doors; only RX8 owners will be used to this feature. The front seat belts are mounted on the door itself so to let people out of the back you have to undo your seatbelt to open the rear doors.

The cars boot is very small and with the seats upright, is a measly 260 litres of space but fold the seats down and this rises to 1100litrs.

The dash is dominated by an iPad style screen, which controls your navigation, heating and radio etc via the idrive control system.

When you drive this car two things will surprise any driver or passenger. The first thing is the total silence when starting the car and the second surprise is the cars amazing performance. Floor the throttle from the lights and you will whizz past an M3 up to 30mph and then the M3 will retake the lead. The cars top speed is a not too embarrassing 93mph, however drive the car hard and prolonged, fast driving will send the battery power plummeting.

The electric-only i3 has a 100-mile range but the addition of the petrol engine limits the cars electric only travel to 93 miles.

The addition of the petrol engine adds another 93 miles giving the driver a potential range of 186miles.

Driving the car in either Eco or Eco Pro mode will extend the car's range by a further 15 per cent. Run the car on its official combined cycle and the range extender i3 will average an eye watering 471mpg.

This impressive figure is achieved by having a fully charged battery and running the range extender motor constantly to keep the battery charged is less efficient. The range extender is only there as a safety net to get you to your next charging point safely.

With the range extender turned off the i3 becomes a zero efficient vehicle. Charging the car from a domestic socket takes seven hours and gives you an 80% charge, though an AC fast charger can be fitted by BMW for £315 and this charges the battery in three hours.

Recent extensive electric vehicle trails have established an electric only i3 is more than adequate for most drivers. The average daily mileage for most drivers is only 25 miles and the average daily commute is only 13 miles. So an electric only 100-mile range should be more than enough but unfortunately its not. Most people expect their cars to travel 400 miles without refueling and this simply isn't possible yet.

BMW have managed to bring a real desirability to the electric car market and the car has already got waiting lists.

With its amazing running costs it is easy to see why people are predicting the electric car revolution is definitely here to stay. When you see BMW's next electric car the i8 it's easy to see why the electric car is here to stay!