

## LONG TERM REVIEW

### The All-New 1997 BMW 540i: Still the Finest Mid-Size Luxury Sedan

Getting to know a car is like forming a good relationship. It really takes quality time to develop.

So when BMW introduced its new 5-Series sedan this spring, we wanted more than a quick flirtation with this vehicle, especially since BMWs are like soul-mates for many of you. So, we asked Robert Mitchell, BMW's product public relations manager, to let us keep the new 540i for three months, and he was happy to oblige.

Believe me, this was one relationship I did not want to end. The new 5-Series exceeded all my expectations. From city stoplights to urban freeways, the sleek new Bimmer made other cars seem more than a bit outdated.

I took the 540i for a long spin around the block—that is through Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia. What did I find? The new V8 engine is silky smooth and quite fast. The 4.4-liter 4-cam powerplant will go from 0-60 mph in 5.53 seconds and it can hit an electronically-limited top speed of 155 mph. But since there is no unlimited speed German



autobahn over here, we never got to experience the 540i at its fastest. However, the husky low-end torque came in handy in city traffic, where defensive driving means breaking away smartly from the pack.

Known for their high fun-to-drive quotient,

BMW's are especially suited for performance enthusiasts. However, the 540i is also loaded with creature comfort features. The soft leather upholstery is complimented by impeccably-finished walnut trim. For added safety, two side-impact airbags are neatly integrated into the door panels.

This nimble BMW can change direction at a moment's notice; I found that out on the crowded beltway surrounding Washington, D.C., when a car ahead of me quickly changed lanes without looking. In a bat of an eye, I quickly maneuvered the 540i around the careless driver, thus avoiding what could have been a nasty accident.

For all you BMW fans, be assured that the new 540i takes the company's reputation to new heights by adding even more excitement and comfort. The verdict! The 1997 BMW 540i is still the best mid-size luxury sedan in its price range (\$49,900). But, my heart was broken when BMW took the car away, and ended our affair.—By Randi Payton

Like most women, I rely on my car daily. But sometimes, I must confess, I take it for granted. I assume that it will keep right on going no matter what I do, or don't do. Wrong! These machines require -- no demand -- love and attention.

For most African-American women, the hectic schedule of juggling job and home, and everything else in between, often pushes car care somewhere near the bottom of our "to do" list. Furthermore, we seem to know precious little about what makes our car tick and how to keep it ticking. That's a big mistake. Firstly, it allows a mechanic to rip you off, because you don't know which questions to ask. And, neglecting a vehicle could be costly in the long run.

No problem. It's not too late to learn. First, you need a book that explains in plain language what you need to know about car care. I stumbled across one that made it all so simple. "Everything Women Always Wanted to Know About Cars But Didn't Know Who To Ask," is an easy, humorous read filled with all sorts of information. The book, written by automotive guru Lesley Hazelton, packs a lot of information about car care as well as car buying trends, car safety and car technology.

There is a section called "A Guided Tour of the Engine," that explains how a car works. Once you have read that, Hazelton suggests reading the owner's manual. "Your best friend when it

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## Woman! Know Thy Car! Car Care Tips for Women

By Jacqueline Mitchell



comes to maintenance, your bible, in fact -- is the owner's manual," she says. Not only will it explain what the knobs and buttons do, but it will also give you a maintenance schedule, like when to change the oil and get a tune-up.

Next, it is important to have a good mechanic, someone who is certified to do the job, and do it right. Ask for referrals from family and co-workers, and then check them out for yourself. Finally, don't be afraid to ask questions. Once you have educated yourself on the inner workings of your car, you are now better equipped to question what your mechanic is doing and why. And try and develop a relationship with an auto mechanic. If you think the work is unnecessary, or the price is a bit steep, don't be afraid to question the mechanic, or even to get a second opinion.

By investing a little bit of time and money on a regular basis, you will dramatically extend the life of your vehicle. But long-term neglect will cause you nothing but trouble -- and cost you big bucks -- down the road.

Please send your questions to Jackie Mitchell, at 2034 National Press Building, Washington, D.C. 20045 or e-mail them to: [AAOW@aol.com](mailto:AAOW@aol.com).