

out of office

Every once in a while expected limits, to the delight of the few lucky enough to be part of it, are exceeded. Lifestyle fundis were treated by BMW to the 7 Series launch that surpassed any launch I have attended in five years.

BMW 7 Series

A VEHICLE 'TO DIE FOR!'

by Carl Wepener

experience the latest rendition of luxury and elegance available from the German manufacturer.



Greeted by senior management at Cape Town International Airport, including MD Bodo Donhauer, the ever popular Richard Carter – who flew out from the UK where he heads up international communications for Rolls Royce, the ever so immaculate Lindsey Pieterse, and always the perfect hostess, Cecilia, Vee Jay and the rest of the team.

With no nonsense we were shown the magnificent chariots and set to experience the latest rendition of luxury and elegance available from the German manufacturer.

When I first set eyes on these lovely new vehicles, I realised it was new without having been blown away by something totally different or bizarre. As my eyes ate up the models exteriors, I picked up the new lines, the deeper kidney grill, the lovely profile and the coupe like flair of the roof. Chrome and body lines all work together to enhance both the aluminium panels and shape. The lights flow into the body and although the body is bigger than its predecessor, it doesn't feel like it as the front has a sporty flair that is seen throughout the vehicle.

Once inside you feel cocooned in the loveliest of in-

teriors, with rich leather and wood and where all of the interior fittings comply to the overall dynamic looks and feel of the car. The driver-oriented cockpit, with its special display in innovative black panel technology, the electronic selector lever on the automatic transmission featured as standard on the centre console in the immediate vicinity of the Dynamic Driving Control unit and BMW iDrive control, as well as the multifunction steering wheel with an extended range of functions, guarantee an unprecedented driving experience. While the outside temperature climbed to the high 20s we were kept cool and massaged by the car's magnificent seats.

Technology and performance

I was amazed at the customer-relevant technology – available at our finger tips, and the very efficient programmes that are there for enjoyment.

I had the chance to drive the BMW 730d, the 750i and 50li (stretched version). The 730d is a straight 6 cylinder diesel engine with single turbo, accelerating to 100kph in 7.2 seconds and with a top speed of 245kph. Fuel consumption as tested during the drive came to 8.8 litres per 100km's.



The BMW 740i was not available for testing, but comes with a magnificent 3 litre straight 6 cylinder engine accelerating from 0kph to 100kph in 5.9 seconds, with a top speed of 250kph.

Driving off in any of the vehicles doesn't give you the sound you expect from a V8 engine. It is subdued, but still authoritative. The heads up display gives you all the necessary data needed, including speed, cruise control, SAT Nav, lane depart and night vision. The system can differentiate animals from people and will show the image of a person or a warning triangle if it is an animal.

The six speed automatic gearbox makes for smooth changes and acceleration is immediate. It is difficult not to make use of the power and, before you realise it, you are doing 200kph. The 7 Series is as silent as they get and only rough roads near Gordon's Bay had an impact on the noise levels. The route made for all kinds of driving in long straights where the power and stability impressed, through hard cornering, to just cruising in order to enjoy the great

scenery along the coast to where we had lunch at La Vierge Restaurant, and then continuing through to La Residence in Franschoek. At our arrival in Franschhoek I used the two side cameras to see around blind corners of the stop street, and it works amazingly well, showing any traffic that otherwise would have been a danger.

Quick access buttons make changes or seeking information easy, and your Owner Manual is on the 80Gb computer and is available on the screen. The ease of use of the iDrive is much easier to use and to follow through with, and is easily reachable by both driver and passenger.

The 7 Series has a number of active safety measures, and one that came in handy is the overtaking triangle on the outside mirror that blinks when you are trying to overtake with a vehicle in your blind spot. Driving at night is made much easier with adaptive lights that not only turn during low speed cornering, but the headlights also adapt for urban or highway driving.

The four wheel steering makes turning really a pleasure while negotiating the twists and turns between Gordons Bay and Rooi Els. Effectively, all four wheels turn in the same direction at speeds over 70kph. Paralel parking is just as easy as the front and back wheels turn in opposite directions to have a greater effect when negotiating parking manoeuvres. Passing through the mountain passes was sheer pleasure and the 6-speed automatic gearbox is fluid but very responsive depending on the four selection or setting between Comfort and Sport.

Accommodation

We were met by Edward Morton and his friendly staff at La Residence and taken to our magnificent rooms. All 11 have different styles varying from Indian (Elton John's décor idea) to French, to name only two. Like the BMW 7 series, this is sheer luxury and fit for royalty. The chandeliers throughout the main building and rooms are 'to die for' and the well-fitted bathrooms are as big as the plush bedrooms with views of both the mountains and

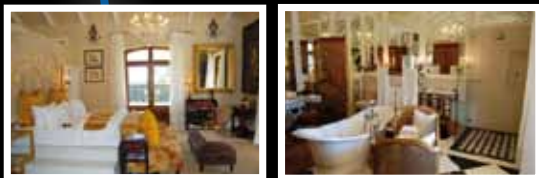
vineyards. The cuisine was out of this world and the service is based on "What ever we can do, we will do for you".

We were all whisked off limousine style to experience the luxury in the back of the vehicles which has separate air-conditioning, radio and screen settings. The seats are adjustable to ensure a real relaxing position. We needed that, not the relaxing, but being driven to a wine tasting at the well-known Grande Provence where we enjoyed the latest in taste and styles of savoury food to complement the experience.

Back at La Residence we were treated to lovely cocktails and dinner with background music to end off the evening.

All good things do come to an end, and we had to say good bye to the BMW team and their great chariots, and to La Residence.

What can I say, but great, great, great and great again. Although pricing starts at over R900 000, it is a magnificent vehicle that will be the envy of many, as will be the experience at La Residence. □



Once inside you feel cocooned in the loveliest of interiors, with rich leather and wood and where all of the interior fittings comply to the overall dynamic look

