

AUTOCAR

EXTRA

→23 pages that are much more than what, where and how to buy

OUR CARS

92 BMW 728i

Bangernomics Bible author James Ruppert puts theory into practice and buys a 12-year-old 7-series for £500.

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Cheap transport or ruinous money pit? Time will tell



BMW 728i

First report Can a £500, 12-year-old 7-series make sense as an everyday car? James Ruppert sets out to prove that Bangernomics really works

I had never seen a picture of it, or even spoken to the seller, but after the exchange of just a few emails I had agreed to buy a 1999 BMW 728i for just 500 quid. What could possibly go wrong?

Well, nothing. And that's because I bought the car from a fine, upstanding member of the community, or in other words an Autocar reader. However, when I first saw the E38 7-series parked outside Michael's house, I did think there had been a mistake. It was big and black and still looked like it was worth the £37k originally paid in 1999. (Michael later said he might have let the Seven go a bit cheap, so he asked if I could plug his Ugandan aid charity to make up the difference, which quite frankly is a marvellous way to do business. It's www.esuubi.org.uk.)

Anyway, a 7-series that costs buttons (well, £500) would make a normal person worry that there was an immense bill just around the corner. Luckily, this wasn't any old 7-series. It had history, in the shape of a big pile of BMW specialist and main dealer invoices, including some reassuringly expensive bills for recent rear suspension work. A set of rear link arms supplied and fitted for £446.45 and a set of rear shock absorbers a few months later at £372.96 have done wonders for the car; not surprisingly, it rides like a firm – but fair – premium-quality mattress.

Even so, this 134,448-mile 7-series was due a service, plus I needed my

local garage to answer the question I ask of it once a year or so, namely, "Will this car bankrupt or even kill me?" In this case, it turned out, neither. They carried out an interim inspection, which meant oil filter, plugs and a check of all the vitals. Michael had mentioned an intermittent wheel wobble at 55-60mph, which had been an issue since 2006, but I had all the wheels balanced and there have been no discernible shakes. Spanner man Stuart pronounced the Seven "solid", and with none of the suspension or brake pipe rot issues that can condemn big cars to the scrapheap.

A clean bill of mechanical health on



James paid just £500 for the BMW. It cost £37k new

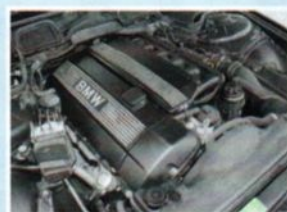
'When I first saw the 7-series, I thought there had been a mistake. It still looks like it was worth the £37k paid in 1999'

a vehicle as ferociously complicated as this is reassuring. The bodywork, however, is a different matter.

I'd picked up the Seven in an August monsoon, which always helps to give paintwork a glossy sheen. Once dry, though, I could see all the imperfections. After a dozen years and a six-figure mileage, any vehicle is going to pick up its share of chips, dinks and dents. However, the Seven's bonnet resembled The Sky at Night or,



Paint had a few (million) flaws...



ENGINE

Magnificent. Quiet, sweet and responsive but wails like a turbine when pushed.



CLIMATE CONTROL

Proudly representing the on-board gadgetry, which all works as it should.



BMW ROUNDEL

Yes, I'm a badge snob. Getting a BMW feels like coming home. I used to sell 'em, y'know...

Love it,
loathe it



PAINTWORK

Except I don't really loathe it because it's all part of the character.



WINDSCREEN

Seal is breaking up, so wind noise is intrusive, plus there's an MOT advisory crack.



The interior is in fine fettle, and all the toys work



Recent suspension work means the Seven still rides well

for younger readers, something that Professor Brian Cox might get excited about, with a Milky Way's worth of tiny, star-like specks of bare metal. At some point the Seven had been resprayed; maybe there was moisture in the air when it was done, or the preparation wasn't spot on, but the result was micro-blisters. Millions of them.

Fortunately, every little blister was touched up by hand by the members of my family who like to do that sort of thing. So did I – sorry, they – use an official BMW Schwarz touch-up stick? Nope, black iron railing paint, which did the trick of deadening the Planetarium effect. Oh yes, that was a happy

weekend as I – sorry, they – vacuumed and buffed the Seven to its former glory. So much so that photographer Stuart called it a big, beautiful black swan. And he's right, of course.

The BMW also goes as well as it looks. A 2.8-litre engine doesn't sound much in a whopping car like a 7-series, but press the accelerator and it takes off smoothly. It even passes for a vaguely economical luxu-berge, with the computer telling me that it is so far returning more than 30mpg, with a mix of longish journeys and local commutes. On the subject of the computer, I did have to dig into the owner's handbook to familiarise myself

with the flight deck. All I have to do now is adjust the electric seat to the optimum position and marvel at BMW's build quality from the last century.

Indeed, as he handed me the keys, Michael said, "This is a car that I could get into and drive to Scotland without a second thought." He was right, you know. See you at John O'Groats. james@bangernomics.com

BMW 728i

Price new £36,900 **Price as tested** £500
Economy 31.7mpg **Expenses** Service
£173.28, road tax £215 **Faults** Paintwork
iffy, one footwell speaker broken, several
pixels missing from dashboard display