



# Highway

AUTOS CALIFORNIA STYLE

## BMW's X5 Oozes Power, Sophistication

### First Drive

By MITCHELL SAM ROSSI  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

With the 2000 X5, BMW has hurled itself into the clash of the wheeled titans and the mighty (and ever-growing) sport-utility vehicle segment.

To avoid having its entrant being labeled as simply another gas-guzzling behemoth, the German auto maker has proclaimed the X5 a "sports-activity vehicle," or SAV, a category of its own invention for this not-exactly-a-truck, lot-more-than-a-station-wagon four-door, five-passenger machine.

Yet how does one prove that the folks at Bayerische Motoren Werke didn't just slap their button logo onto someone else's truck, pop in an aluminum V-8, dangle a \$50,000 price tag in the window and assume that their automotive laurels would fetch them a slice of this market?

Except for the occasional pothole along Sunset Boulevard, local streets and freeways hardly challenge the X5's claims of responsiveness, stability and comfort. If this SUV—pardon, SAV—built in Spartanburg, S.C., wants us to believe it is a true BMW, there is only one road in California on which to test its mettle: Pacific Coast Highway.

In the confines of Los Angeles, the

Coast Highway starts and stops like the morning commute. It changes names and personalities and is often lost under metropolitan sprawl. But at the end of the Santa Monica Freeway, it regains its soul.

Edging the speed limit, we aim the X5 4.4i—the bigger-engined of the two models BMW has introduced this year—toward the darkness of the McClure Tunnel. The city disappears as we tumble through this L.A. answer to Alice's rabbit hole, leaving a wide expanse of sea, sand and sea gulls visible through the vehicle's generous greenhouse.

As we push north toward Malibu, the X5's distinctive styling—exemplified by the trademark twin-kidney grille and quad headlamps—seems made for this exclusive side of town.

Still, it is like walking a bulldog through a poodle show.

The X5 is thick and heavy, topping the scales at nearly 2½ tons. At each corner it brandishes 18-inch alloy wheels wrapped in wide all-season rubber. The optional sport package offers 19-inch paws and even more tire. Yet the X5's short overhangs and seething power enable it to rally to the front of the stylish traffic.

The interior is BMW-familiar. Tan leather abounds, enclosed by acres of burl wood and accents of brushed aluminum. It is predictably luxurious, with all the expected amenities. Below the center

gauges is the on-board computer's LED readout. A button on the blinker yoke indexes through average speed, fuel consumption and a profusion of other data.

The wider track of the X5 offers more interior room than the BMW 5-Series sedans and thus flattens out the dash, removing the driver's totalitarian command of the radio and climate controls.

Three air bags keep each of the front occupants safe. One is an inflatable cylinder designed to protect against head injuries in a side collision. While this is all standard up front, the door-mounted side-impact bags are optional for the folks in the rear.

Farther up the road, the rocky palisades squeeze the Coast Highway until the asphalt has the texture of wind chop. It would be a rough ride for an SUV based on a truck-like ladder frame. The X5, however, employs a stiff unit body-chassis construction, and the rigidity is felt in the vehicle's solid ride and precise handling. Incorporating a fully independent suspension with a multi-link, self-leveling system at the rear, this Bimmer let us enjoy our *chai latte* at leisure.

U.S. 101 eventually takes over but thankfully remains tethered to the weaving coastline. Traffic thins, and we have the chance to tickle the throttle. With a deep burble, the 4.4-liter, dual-overhead-cam, 32-valve V-8 brandishes its 282

Please see Drive, G2

### 2000 E

#### Cost

- Base, \$49,999 includes five-spoke Steptronic electronically controlled automatic transmission with adaptive control, full-time all-wheel drive, four-wheel disc brakes with anti-lock braking system, leather upholstery, four-speaker on-board computer, air conditioning, dual air bags, front-seat

#### Type

- Front-engine

#### Engine

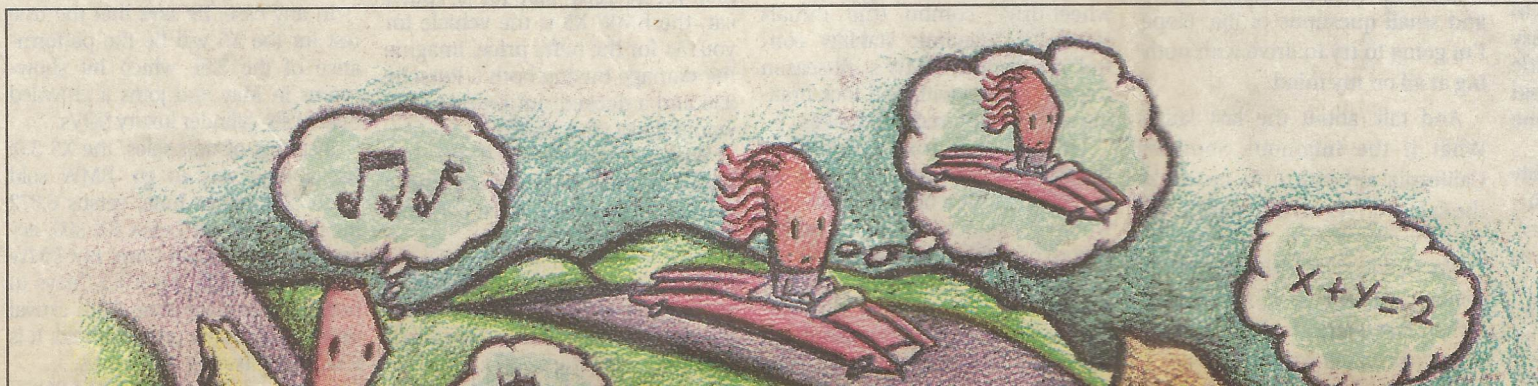
- 4.4-liter, dual-overhead-cam, 32-valve V-8, 282 horsepower at 3,600 rpm.

#### Performance

- 0 to 60 mph in 7.5 seconds
- Top speed, 130 mph with sport package
- Fuel consumption by the Environmental Protection Agency, 19 mpg, as tested

#### Curb Weight

- 4,828 pounds



# Highway 1

LOS ANGELES CALIFORNIA STYLE

**Classified**  
▶ **INSIDE**

## Power, Sophistication

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## 2000 BMW X5 4.4i

**Cost**  
■ Base, \$49,970: includes five-speed Steptronic electronically controlled automatic transmission with adaptive control; full-time all-wheel drive, four-wheel disc brakes with anti-lock braking system, leather upholstery, four-function on-board computer, air conditioning, dual front-impact two-stage air bags, front-seat side-impact air bags, AM-FM stereo-cassette audio system.



MITCHELL SAM ROSSI/For The Times

- Type**  
■ Front-engine, all-wheel-drive, four-door, five-passenger light truck.
- Engine**  
■ 4.4-liter, dual-overhead-cam, 32-valve V-8 developing 282 horsepower at 5,400 rpm and torque of 324 foot-pounds at 3,600 rpm.
- Performance**  
■ 0 to 60 mph: 7.5 seconds.  
■ Top speed, manufacturer's estimate: 128 mph (143 mph with sport package).  
■ Fuel consumption: 13 miles per gallon city, 17 mpg highway, as estimated by the Environmental Protection Agency; up to 19 mpg, as tested.
- Curb Weight**  
■ 4,828 pounds.

Los Angeles Times



## Chrysler, DMV Feud Shines Light on Lemon Law



can be resolved by or dealer, the repaired and the that the vehicle was back.

California's Con- tion Act requires hicle with a history lems to disclose s to prospective

proposed tougher w, sponsored by Auto Reliability and mento-based con- he measure, await- e California Legisla- e auto makers only fix defects before ed to buy back the

case is an example e lemon laws are nec- ct consumers, said Rosemary Shahan. "safety is at stake" e people are unwit- e defective vehicles, it nomenally danger- she said.

ed the delay in im- ns on Chrysler "bad imers because [auto they can get away

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ieve you!" she yelled even with my car. r head to watch me, drive right into my

"There are at least 100,000 lemons bought back [by auto makers] each year. And at an average price of \$20,000, that's \$2 billion worth of lemons," he said.

And when auto makers and dealers resell the vehicles, he said, there's a financial incentive to hide the fact that they had been defective. A vehicle branded as a repaired lemon will sell for about 25% less than a similar vehicle without a history of problems, according to Ditlow.

While a 45-day business license suspension in California "wouldn't have a big economic impact on Chrysler," he said, "it would leave a huge stigma of shame" and send a message to other car makers.

Though Chrysler and other manufacturers have been reprimanded or penalized for alleged auto lemon laundering in other instances, no major auto maker has ever had its business license suspended in any state, Ditlow said.

*Jeanne Wright cannot answer mail personally but responds in this column to automotive questions of general interest. Write to Your Wheels, Business Section, Los Angeles Times, 202 W. 1st St., Los Angeles, CA 90012. E-mail: jeanrite@aol.com.*

space!"

Stung by a mixture of horror, relief and embarrassment, I couldn't bring myself to reply.

But now I've resolved to mend my ways. No more mental movies or sing-alongs, no more computations, no more pondering the great and small questions of life. Nope, I'm going to try to drive with nothing at all on my mind.

And talk about the last laugh: What if the infamous Southern California airhead turns out to be the safest driver on the road?

*Cathy Curtis, a Los Angeles-based freelancer and former Times staff writer, last wrote for Highway 1 about car brochures. She can be reached at highway1@latimes.com.*

times, which are subject to change. Send listings to Miss Information's Automotive Calendar of Events, 6475 E. Pacific Coast Highway, Suite 375, Long Beach, CA 90803. To fax listings: (714) 761-3500. To subscribe: (714) 229-9100.

## Coming Events

### TODAY

**Pomona.** Twilight Cruise presented by NHRA

## Drive

### Continued from G1

horsepower. Immediately, 324 foot-pounds of torque are converted into forward lunge that is both surprising and delightful.

Finally, the Coast Highway sheds the last vestiges of civilization. We tempt the V-8 again by tapping the center shift lever into a small left gate. The five-speed Steptronic transmission seamlessly switches to sport mode. Another touch of the knob and it becomes an electronically activated sequential gearbox.

Here, an alarm would be a good addition to the X5's on-board computer. Passengers need to be warned that it is time to seal their coffee cups, store their cellular phones and find something to hold on to.

A quick downshift and a tap on the brakes set up the first corner. Soon, the tires are squealing in protest. The X5 dips and pitches less than expected as we pursue late apexes through the coast's picturesque corners.

In the canyons, the morning sun has yet to dry the night's mist from the asphalt, but the threat goes unheeded. The X5's new DSC-X all-wheel-drive combo (the initials stand for "dynamic stability control") integrates BMW's all-season traction system with anti-lock braking and platter-sized disc brakes.

Under harsh road conditions, the DSC-X enhances stability by applying a touch of brake pressure when the steering angle, wheel speed or body yaw veer beyond the vehicle's established safety parameters. Thankfully, the system—which comes as standard equipment—also keeps zealous drivers in line.

tique cars, classic bicycles, vintage motorcycles. Also: Model T car show, early gas engines and antique automotive and specialty displays by local clubs. Presented by Long Beach Model T Club, Cerritos College, 11110 E. Alondra Blvd. Noon to 7 p.m. Also Saturday, 6 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Sunday, 7 a.m. to noon. (310) 353-6662.

### SATURDAY

**Lake View Terrace.** Blessing of the Cars 2000,

The X5's cornering ability seems to defy the laws of physics and is perhaps BMW's most significant design feat in this vehicle. While the occupants ride nearly a foot higher in the X5 than in the 740i sedan, the shared engine gains only three inches of altitude. Deft engineering runs the front drive shaft through the engine oil pan and thus keeps the vehicle's center of gravity as low as possible.

A few more hairpin turns and we are buying wholeheartedly into BMW's mantra of "the ultimate driving machine." Still, it is hard to shake the fact that this is a truck, and one that carries a price tag that brings a new dimension to the term "sticker shock."

As we return home via the long, dull and often sardine-packed interstate, the X5 offers one last surprise. Using the cruise control to shackle us to the speed limit, we exceeded BMW's published EPA mileage figures and on the highway portion of our return trip from San Francisco, averaged 19 miles per gallon.

A Honda Insight it's not, but as the Coast Highway joyfully revealed, the X5 is no lumbering SUV either.

If you are about to join SUV-mania, yet secretly lust for a sports car, the BMW X5 is the vehicle for you. As for the hefty price, imagine the damage buying both a Porsche 996 and a decked-out Lexus LX470 would do to your portfolio.

Without question, BMW has found a balance between these worlds and created a remarkable piece of machinery.

*Mitchell Sam Rossi is a longtime contributor to The Times who also writes for European Car. This is his first review for Highway 1. He can be reached at speedwrtr@aol.com.*

5 p.m. (323) 663-1266.

**Norco.** Cruise Night 2000, open to American vehicles. Hot Rod's, 1103 Ave. 5 p.m. (909) 279-9011.

**Pomona.** West Coast Hot Rod Ha featuring rods, customs and ra through '72. Presented by Goodguys Custom Assn. Pomona Raceway, 11101 W. McKinley Ave. 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday, same hours. (925) 858-1111. <http://www.goodguysgoodtimes.com>.

## These Things Are Flying Off the Lot

## Power Pulse

### NEW-VEHICLE SALES TRENDS

Although BMW's X5 has tearing up the highway only a limited time, purchasing trends are beginning to surface in dealer surveys conducted by J.D. Power & Associates.

Of all the X5 trade-ins, according to Tom Libby, Detroit-based director of the firm's Power Information work, about 36% are BMW cars.

Clearly, BMW owners are a lot. And they are willing to trade in their current vehicles with the average transaction price of the X5 4.4i at \$55,975 in Power & Associates survey, that of the 3.0i at \$47,008.

The top trade-ins—the Jeep Cherokee and Mercedes-Benz ML320 sport-utility—indicate the X5 is "doing an excellent job of winning over owners of the DaimlerChrysler SUVs, Libby says.

Libby cautions that some of the data, collected from dealer surveys of major markets between January and July 9, are drawn from a statistically insignificant sample.

In any case, he says that the test for the X5 will be the performance of the 3.0i, which hit the showroom in May and joins a field of six-cylinder luxury SUVs.

In terms of unit sales, the X5 has a long way to go. BMW sold 1,415 of them in June, versus 1,415 for the smash-hit Lexus RX. According to Autodata Corp., BMW can take heart in the 3.0i's sales "turn," the average time from the dealer's lot until it is sold. It is a segment-leading seven days.

—MITCHELL SAM ROSSI