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Sección informativa



BMW adds another stylish model to its lineup

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The all-new X6 from the Bavarian Motor Works is unquestionably a fine performer.

It is, after all, a BMW, with all that entails: superb handling, two powerful engines, supple ride and, of course, high prices. What is questionable is the concept.

In essence, the 2008 X6 is a heavy fastback-bodied, four-door hatchback perched high on its suspension, SUV-like, with giant wheels and tires. For antique-car buffs, it's reminiscent of a jacked-up '49 Buick torpedo-body sedan, Hot Wheels style.

The X6 joins BMW's X3 and X5 models. Both also are SUV-like performance machines that the company calls sport activity vehicles, or SAVs. The X6, however, is called a sport activity coupe, or SAC, despite its four doors.

The concept, according to Andreas Lampka, the spokesman for BMW's X lineup, was to produce a novelty — something sportier and more powerful than the X5, which has more traditional, squared-off SUV styling.

He said it was designed to appeal to enthusiasts who own — or would like to own — the elegant 6-Series coupe, but wanted more room and all-wheel drive capability.

That's a fairly exclusive group. Sales of the 6-Series coupe and convertible totaled just 9,033 in 2007. BMW officials will not discuss their sales projection, but Automotive News reported it at about 20,000 the first year.

All of the X6s for markets worldwide are being built in the United States, in BMW's Spartanburg, S.C., plant, which also produces the X5 and the Z4 sports car.

The uncertainty is whether BMW has found another sweet spot in the market or produced the automotive equivalent of a white elephant — or, as seems likely, something in between.

The X6 is neither practical nor a car for the masses. Compared to the 6-Series or other luxury coupes, it offers expanded capabil-



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ity and the convenience of four doors. It has the passenger room of a mid-size sedan, with about double the cargo volume.

But compared to a crossover or SUV, it has tight rear-seat accommodations and restricted cargo space.

There are two models: the xDrive 35i, with a 300-horsepower, twin-turbo six-cylinder engine and a base price of \$54,050, and the xDrive 50i, with an all-new 400-horsepower V8 and a starting sticker of \$64,550.

There are plenty of options to boost that even higher. The tested six-cylinder model topped out at \$65,395, and it's possible to jack the V8 version to around \$80,000.

Both models come with a new all-wheel drive system that BMW calls "dynamic performance control." It's a mechanical setup with computer-controlled clutch packs on both sides of the rear differential that automatically shift the torque between the two rear wheels.

It corrects the attitude of the X6, in effect making up for any shortcomings or stupid inputs by the driver. It works even when the car is coasting, and it means that the tall X6, with its relatively high center of gravity, can be tossed around the curves on a race track as if it were a rally car.

Both models, despite their bulk, have impressive performance. The 5,269-pound 50i, according to BMW's tests, accelerates to 60 miles an hour in about five seconds, while the 4,894-pound 35i does it in about 6.5 seconds.

Of course, all that weight and power exact a penalty. The 35i manages just 15/20 miles per gallon, using premium fuel, on the EPA's city/highway cycle. The 50i, at 13/18, is thirstier. There are two relatively frugal diesel models, but they are not available here.

The X6 is a serenely quiet highway cruiser, with virtually no wind noise, little road noise and only muted sounds from under the hood.

At a glance

BASE PRICE INCLUDING DESTINATION CHARGE: \$54,050

PRICE AS TESTED: \$65,395

ENGINE: Three-liter six-cylinder, turbocharged, 300 horsepower

LENGTH: 192 inches

WEIGHT: 4,894 pounds

EPA CITY/HIGHWAY FUEL MILEAGE: 15/20 miles per gallon

Both the V8 and six have twin turbochargers. The latter is the same engine used in the 135i and 335i BMW sedans, and doesn't give up much to the V8.

The six-speed transmission is a slick shifter, either as an automatic or manually shifted with paddles on the steering wheel. At low speeds the steering is heavy, but feels appropriate at speed.

As with other high end BMWs, the X6 has a luxury ambience inside, with polished wood and leather upholstery.

It also comes with BMW's infamous iDrive, which operates a multitude of functions including setting the open position of the power rear hatch. Though somewhat simplified from the original, the iDrive still can be maddening to operate, even by people familiar with it.

Because of the fastback body, the rear window is small and the pillars wide, hampering visibility, so it's important to get the outside mirrors adjusted properly to eliminate blind spots.

Access to the back seats is not easy and there are no assist handles inside, despite the X6's height. The seats are comfortable, but short on head room, and the seat backs do not recline.

There's nearly 26 cubic feet of cargo space under the rear hatch. But the slope of the body restricts the shapes of objects that can be stashed back there. However, as BMW points out, it is way more useful than the trunk of a coupe.