

Der Sonnenfleck

Sunshine Bimmers Newsletter

Winter 2014

Volume 18 Issue 1

Chapter Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting and holiday party was held December 15th at OLV Café in Orlando. We had 53 members and guests in attendance, making it our largest event in recent history. The proposed Bylaws amendment was adopted unanimously by those attending, who also approved a donation of \$1,000 to the BMW Foundation in support of its new driver education program. If you were unable to attend, you really missed a great event. Here are photos of a few of the people who didn't make that mistake.



New Website Launched

The new Sunshine Bimmers Chapter website, www.sunshinebimmers.org, was launched on January 17, although we are still adding content and features. Among the new features already online are a classified ads section where members can post ads for things they want to sell. We will also be adding a function to allow the Chapter to sell things, too, such as registration for our upcoming track events. Our Home page includes news items from BMW CCA and the Chapter. The enhanced calendar function will soon be fully populated with our events for 2014.

MINI Wins Dakar 2014 Race

MINI placed first, second, and third in the just completed Dakar 2014 Rally. Run this year in South America rather than on its namesake Paris to Dakar route due to civil unrest in the African continent, the race nevertheless covered extensive desert terrain. All three podium cars were from the MINI ALL4 Racing Team. To be sure, these were not normal MINIs. They were custom-built from the ground up and featured 3-liter engines producing 307 hp, 510 lb ft of torque. You can read more about this remarkable achievement, which occurred on almost the exact 50th anniversary of MINI's first rally win in Monte Carlo, at the North American Motoring forum (<http://www.northamericanmotoring.com/forums/r60-countryman-talk/264315-countryman-sweeps-dakar-2014-a.html>).

Sunrise to Sunset Tour Planned for Valentine's Day Weekend

Robin Butler has organized a Sunrise to Sunset tour for the weekend of February 14-16. The event starts at 7:30 Friday night at the Coquina Beach Surf Club on St. Augustine Beach. We stay overnight at the Ascend Collection Castillo Real. We will arise early the next morning to view the sunrise over the Atlantic Ocean before breakfast at the La Cocina International Restaurant and start our tour on less-traveled roads to St. Pete Beach, our sunset destination. The destination is the Postcard Inn on the Beach, who's Beach Bar & Grill is the oldest bar in St. Pete Beach. The hotel rooms available are all booked, but you may still join us for one of the dinners or on the tour across Florida. To participate in the tour, be at the La Cocina International Restaurant at 530 A1A Beach Blvd. in St. Augustine Beach by 8:30 am on Saturday morning. Please contact Chapter President Al Butler at abutler@mpzero.com for more information.

New Car Driving Report: The BMW i3

by Joseph Lenart

There is the idea of the BMW i3 and then there is driving the i3. Imagine no water pump, no oil changes, no valves, no oil cooler, and no gas station. The i3 is made of carbon fiber, it is "baked" and glued together in Leipzig, Germany; this modern plant is also home to 1 Series production. The i3 is built in a quiet environment, the workers are not required to wear hearing protection, and the electricity to build the vehicle is provided by large on-site windmills. These windmills can be seen filling the landscape in this part of Germany; these windmills are large and impressive.

Now I know where all my old plastics bottles go, the i3 material seats are made from recycled plastic. The i3 is environmentally friendly to say the least; it is constructed from many other recycled materials. The dashboard wood comes from fast growing renewable forests; the leather seats are naturally dyed with olive oil and come in only one color, dark brown. Overall, BMW made a large investment in the entire production process for the new vehicle construction.

In the week before Christmas, the BMW of North America national marketing program brought several i3s to the local BMW dealership as a stop on their national marketing tour. These i3s were European models not yet fully certified for the US market; they had just enough components to be allowed into the US temporarily. The vehicles were all orange with black trim and a black hood, actually all the color options will have a black hood with black trim and of course decorative kidney grills, since a radiator is no longer required.

The electric motor is located in the rear of the vehicle on the driver side and the lithium-ion batteries are located at the bottom of the vehicle for a low center of gravity. Under the front hood is a small trunk to store the charging cables and other small items. More storage is available in the back similar to the BMW X1.

The i3 electric motor produces the equivalent of 170 hp and 184 foot-pounds of torque; this power plant can propel the 2,700-pound i3 to 60 mph in just over 7 seconds. The range of the battery is stated as 80 to 100 miles on average, longer in economy mode.

The test vehicle had the olive oil dyed leather seats which look nice and they were comfortable also. There was great outward visibility through the large windows and the dashboard area is very functional and appealing even with the large center display noted by many as a floating display. It did seem more integrated and visual visually appealing than the display on the current generation 3 Series vehicles.

As I grasped the steering wheel I noted the steering wheel had a nice feel to it not too large or small and the cross section of the steering wheel has a nice rounded feel in the hands. The key was a slightly larger key FOB remote control. The drive selector was on the right-hand side of the steering column, twist up for the drive position and down for reverse; I quickly adjusted to this and it seemed relatively straightforward to use. It also had a standard looking Start/Stop button.

I started off by backing up and turning around to leave the parking lot. There was a fixed route that the marketing people wanted me to drive and I said that I was just going to drive my normal test route to compare with other vehicles. I turned left onto the road in front of the dealership and when the front wheels were straight, I "floored" the accelerator.

There was an immediate strong linear acceleration without any torque steer or shifting of gears. The full torque of the electric motor is immediately available; only a slight pleasant whirring sound was noticeable during hard acceleration and an eerie sensation of rushing forward without noise in a hushed cabin. The steering response is very good, although the vehicle was not pushed to any degree; there were only some minor curves during the brief test drive.

There were no strange sounds emanating from the vehicle, as is the case in some hybrids such as the Toyota Prius. In the past, we noticed some annoying high-pitched humming sounds in a Prius V that we rented for several days. Only a slight wind rush was discernible in the i3; no other annoying sounds.

“One pedal” driving is possible under most normal driving circumstances due to the regenerative braking. Under normal driving conditions, releasing the accelerator quickly slowed the vehicle due to regenerative braking which captures energy during braking to help re-charge the batteries. If the accelerator is slightly depressed, the i3 will roll without braking action, typical of a standard vehicle.

My first driving impression was very good, this is a different car in many dimensions, it is much nicer to drive than the Nissan Leaf I drove a few months earlier, the leaf is a front wheel drive vehicle with only 107 hp for the electric motor. There is a display screen for the i3 right in front of the driver that displays such things as the speed of the vehicle. It is a digital readout and I am not a fan of digital speed display, I would prefer an electronic analog display.

I only drove on the local streets; the battery low alarm sounded when I was going to go on the highway. The i3 is promoted by BMW as a “city car” although it can attain 93 mph, only electronically limited to that speed to conserve battery power. I was not able to determine the driving characteristics on the highway or wind noise at higher speeds.

It was a nice warm day and the air-conditioning seemed to work well, the summer would be a real test. There is no B pillar and the front door has to be opened before the backward opening rear doors could be opened. The back seating room is restricted and the rear windows do not lower.

An interesting option currently available in Europe is a \$9,000 carport with solar panels to charge the i3, there are similar plans for the US market using a company called Solar City; this is an exciting option in addition to using standard house current. It is possible to charge the 22 KWh battery using 120 volts using a standard outlet in 6 to 8 hours or faster with the higher voltage units (240 volts).

Several other options will be offered, such as the optional range extender option that uses a two-cylinder motorcycle engine to extend the range to 200 miles without stopping. The gasoline engine does not provide any propulsion; the engine is only used to charge the batteries. There is an alternate mobility program being considered by BMW to provide i3 owners with loaner vehicles for longer trips. The current price starts in the low \$40,000 range for the base vehicle; the i3 will be available in early 2014.

The i3 is worthy of consideration and I plan to take it on an extended test drive to measure the potential battery drain under my driving style. I've experienced much lower than rated fuel economy driving hybrids; one has to adjust to a very slow and undemanding driving style to gain the maximum fuel efficiency as rated by the manufacturers. I am also looking forward to driving the i3 on the highway.

But I Followed the Manual

by Joseph Lenart

I had my suspicions that it was getting weak, it is that feeling that something is just not quite right; my suspicions were realized when it was replaced. Two weeks passed by before I could drive the 128i and then after we returned from a second consecutive trip, it would not start the next morning. My 2011 128i is still under warranty so I called the BMW Service Center that very morning. They told me just to call BMW Roadside Assistance and have the car transported to the service center. I am not that fond of having my car towed or transported; I asked the

service advisor if there is anything special I needed to know about jumpstarting the car, this way I can just drive it myself without the anxiety of having it towed or transported.

After three years, 27,000 miles, and using the convertible top a lot, the most likely problem was the original battery. I knew about the remote battery terminals located under the hood of the car, the battery in the trunk could be difficult to access if there is no power in the vehicle. The trunk release is electronic and without enough electrical power, the trunk will not open; the hood release of the car is a manual cable. The service advisor told me that there is nothing special about the jumpstarting procedure; just follow the instructions in the manual.

I carefully reviewed the jumpstart procedures in my owner's manual, I actually wrote out the detailed steps to follow such as the order in which to connect the positive and negative terminals of the "donor" car and also removing the cables afterward in the proper order. I made arrangements to drop off the vehicle in the evening; I would just jumpstart the vehicle after arriving home from work and then my wife could pick me up in our second vehicle, thus avoiding having to transport the car for such a minor problem.

Since the 128i has a manual transmission, it was easy to put the vehicle into neutral and roll it out of the garage for clear access to our other vehicle. I located the battery connection points under the hood and followed the detailed procedure. Once the cables were in place, I attempted to start the 128i; nothing happened. There seemed to be some power transfer, the interior lights started working very dimly; however, the starter would not engage.

I thought maybe it just didn't have enough battery capacity; I left the cables connected to the other vehicle running for at least 15 minutes to see if that would help. I tried it again without any success; I had to push the 128i back into the garage, it is heavier than it appears. I could not avoid calling BMW Roadside Assistance after all; I called them the next day and arranged for an early morning pickup at my house.

The next morning, the transporter arrived right on time; the driver introduced himself as Wayne and he asked me what the problem was with the vehicle. I told him that I tried jumpstarting the 128i with my other vehicle and it would not start. Wayne said right away that it would be unnecessary to push the vehicle into the street, he could start the vehicle. I was somewhat incredulous, he quickly returned from his truck carrying a portable battery pack. I lifted the hood of the vehicle and he connected the battery pack to the remote terminals; I pushed the "Start/Stop" button and the vehicle instantly came to life.

As Wayne noted my expression of frustration, he said, "I know what you were doing wrong"; he told me that I must have had the "donor" vehicle running. I said yes, that's absolutely correct; that's exactly what the directions in the owner's manual state. I showed him the copy of the page in the owner's manual. He said that if I had connected the cables directly to the battery in the trunk, then that would've worked; the remote terminals will not start the vehicle if the donor vehicle is running.

This is totally contrary to the manual that came with the 128i; this is also contrary to the most recent manual that I downloaded from the BMW website. Even my 2013 328i has the identical instructions, which are inaccurate. Wayne did let me drive my own car up onto the back of the transporter, so at least that made me feel a little better; he said he has a lot of experience with BMWs and not to worry. I was not sure that was actually good news, he quickly added that the problems were mostly with batteries or flat tires. As it turns out, a new

battery was all that was needed; I will definitely update my version of the owner's manual, sometimes reading the manual itself can be an adventure.

Editor's Note: I want to thank Joseph for providing two articles to include in this issue of *Der Sonnenfleck*. Other recent member authors include Nick Katona, Steve Dovi, and George Poelker. I encourage all members to submit articles for the newsletter. We would really be interested in how you enjoy or work on BMWs.

Upcoming Events – See website for more info

February 14-16	Sunrise to Sunset Tour
February 22	Florida Suncoast Chapter BMW CCA Concours d'Elegance in Lakeland
February 22-23	Sebring HPDE by Gold Coast and Suncoast Regions of PCA
February 25	Teutonic Tuesday at OLV Café; starts at 7:00 pm
March 25	Teutonic Tuesday at OLV Café; starts at 7:00 pm
March 29-30	Sunshine Bimmers Chapter hosts BMW CCA Club Racing at Sebring

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Sunshine Bimmers Chapter Board of Directors

President Al Butler

abutler@mpzero.com

407-376-3258

Secretary Amy Rutenberg

Amanda.Rutenberg@health-first.org

Vice President George Poelker

gpoelker@gmail.com

407-230-8052

Treasurer & Club Racing Patrick Spikes

pspikes@cfl.rr.com

407-454-2057

Directors Nick Katona, Keith Proud, and Deborah Pandeline

Website:

www.sunshinebimmers.org

Special thanks go to our official Chapter photographer, Bob Compton, for the photographs contained in this newsletter.

