GRAND TOURERS

The BMW 3-Series may be a common sight but if you're after race-developed rarity, check out these three homologation specials.

Words: Joe Clifford Photos: Simon Dodd

We have a feeling some special editions are more special than others. If you think a pinstripe, different wheel trims and a snappy name associated with a tropical isle make a car more desirable, think again. Ideally a truly special, special edition needs to be a homologated race car, featuring race-honed bodywork and a very short production run.

Something like these three M3s, in fact. They are among the rarest and most sought after models in BMW's 3-Series range: an E30 M3 Sport Evolution, an E36 M3 GT and an E36 M3 GT2.

The E30 M3 Sport Evolution is considered the ultimate E30 and was built between December 1989 and March 1990. Only 600 examples were constructed in order to homologate various components for Group A racing. The most significant change for this model was the adoption of a 238bhp 2.5 litre engine which was claimed to blast the BMW to 60mph in 6.4sec and on to a 154mph maximum. Other features of this end-of-the-line superstar are a three-way adjustable Electronic Damping Control, revised interior, adjustable front and rear spoilers, and widened arches built to accept 18" wheels for racing purposes.

This example is owned by Steve Webb, a car valeter from St Albans and a man who's no stranger to *PBMW*. Last month (2/02 p48-55) we used his other E30 M3 in a comprehensive 'How To' feature. But, as he told us: "When you've got an E30 M3, you want the best one, the fastest."

It took a great deal of searching to find a decent Sport Evo. Some were being advertised for upwards of £15000 but closer examination often revealed tatty bodywork, dodgy paint and threadbare interiors.

Eventually, this one turned up and, after some hard bargaining, the M3 became Steve's for a rip-your-arm-off price of £10,000. Despite having covered 100,000 miles, the M3's service schedule had been rigorously maintained and its overall condition was near faultless. Steve admitted to taking a week's busman's holiday valeting it into its showroom-like state.

"I haven't really had the opportunity to drive this one much," Steve revealed, "but the seats are much better and it pulls more

GRAND TOURERS

strongly than the 2.3." He hoped to equal BMW's claimed acceleration times on the runway with our VBox timing gear. The cold, damp weather won't help, though.

Much less is known about the E36 M3 GT. Homologated to comply with 1995 Le Mans regulations, apparently just 396 were made on BMW's Individual production line – all painted British Racing green, yet only 50 were earmarked for the UK.

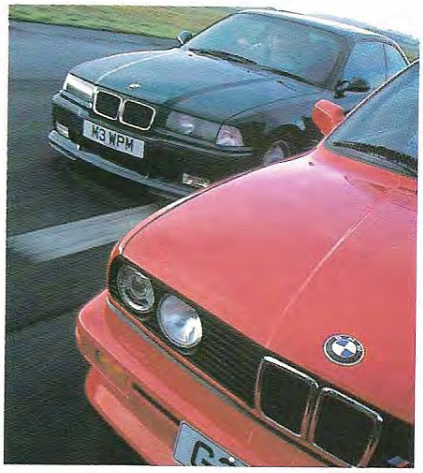
Based on the S50 B30-engined M3, BMW tuned it to 295bhp (up from 286bhp) to become the precursor to the 3.2 engine. It featured revised intake runners, dual intake oil pump and baffled sump, all of which were included in the later Evo spec. More aggressive cams and its own ECU software further distinguish the GT engine. The suspension turrets were held steady by a matt black M-Tech strut brace and the wheels were forged rather than cast.

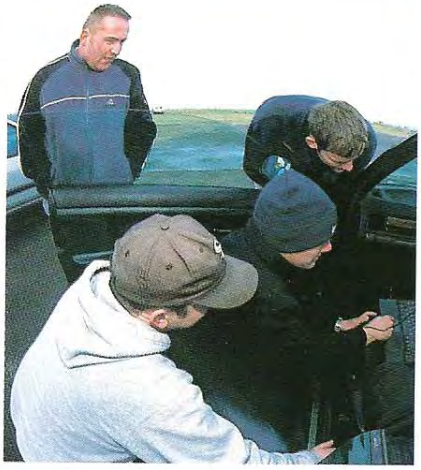
No M3 badges could originally be found on a GT's exterior, these were replaced with white BMW Motorsport International badges on its lightweight, aluminium doors and a stealthy, badge-free rump. Many owners have since retro-fitted M3 tags.

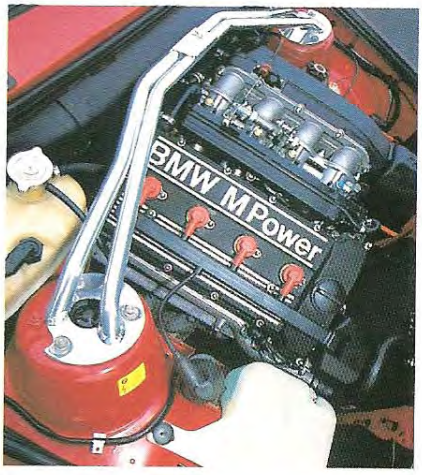
However, the GT could be easily distinguished by the Class II high-level rear wing which offered increased downforce over 80mph, though it ultimately knocked 5mph from the top speed. Likewise, the splitters up front could be extended up to 50mm to increase downforce while also feeding more air through to the brake ducts.

Stepping inside, Alcantara and Mexico green leather trim lend an air of luxury. The GT is no stripped-out special, it still has all the luxury goodies expected in such a high-end product. Strangely, yet annoyingly, BMW decided to deck the dashboards of UK cars in wood, whereas European versions had carbon fibre trim. "BMW must've thought us Brits were like Lord Snooty, or something," Barry Jones, the owner of this GT, remarked.

At the time of writing, Barry had owned the car just three months. He'd been

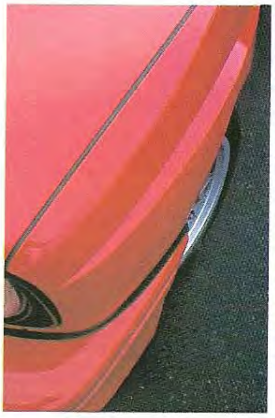




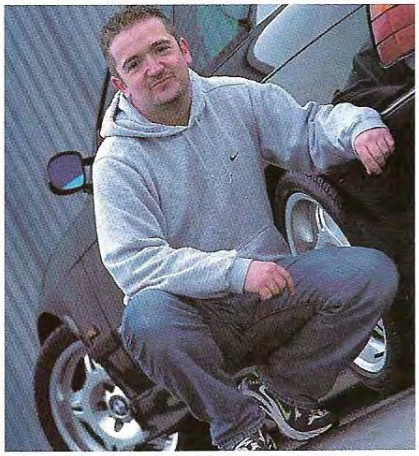


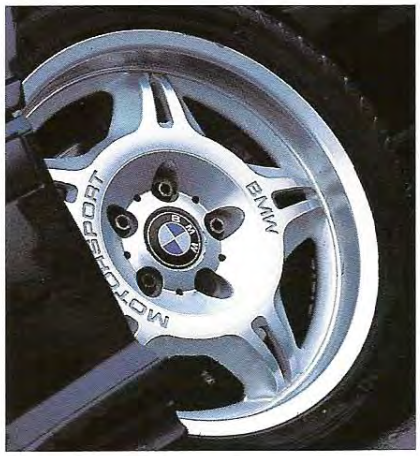
searching for an M3 when the GT turned up on the Internet: "It was a bit more money than I wanted to spend," he said, "but I cleared it with the missus and found the extra cash." Fortunately, the 'specialist' he bought it from didn't realise what he was dealing with, thinking it was a tarted-up boy racer M3 fitted with a bigger rear spoiler. Barry loves its unusual and unique colour scheme though.

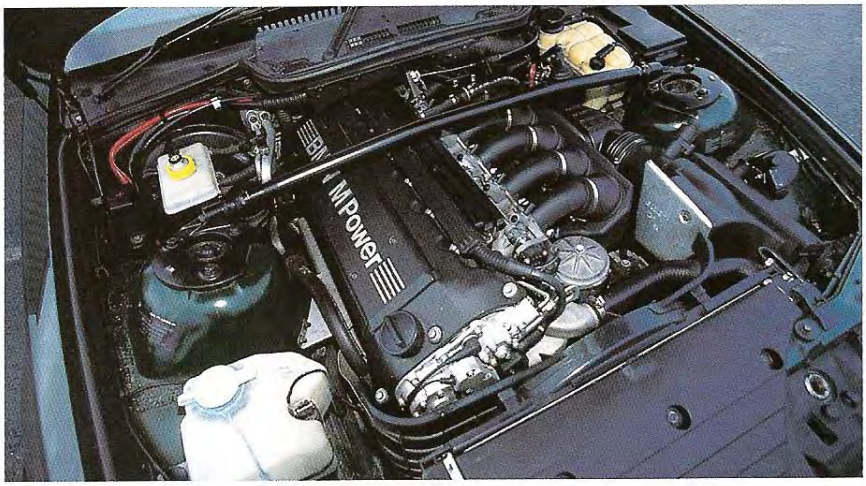
After owning three E30s, Barry found the E36 to be in a different class altogether. "The car's everything I thought it would be," he commented, but also reckoned it's quite deceiving: "You think, yeah, it's going quite well, but then you look at the speedo and

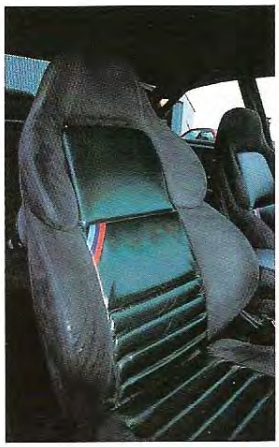


Above: E30 M3 Sport Evo identified by 2.5 engine, interior, bigger arches and driver's stupid wide grin









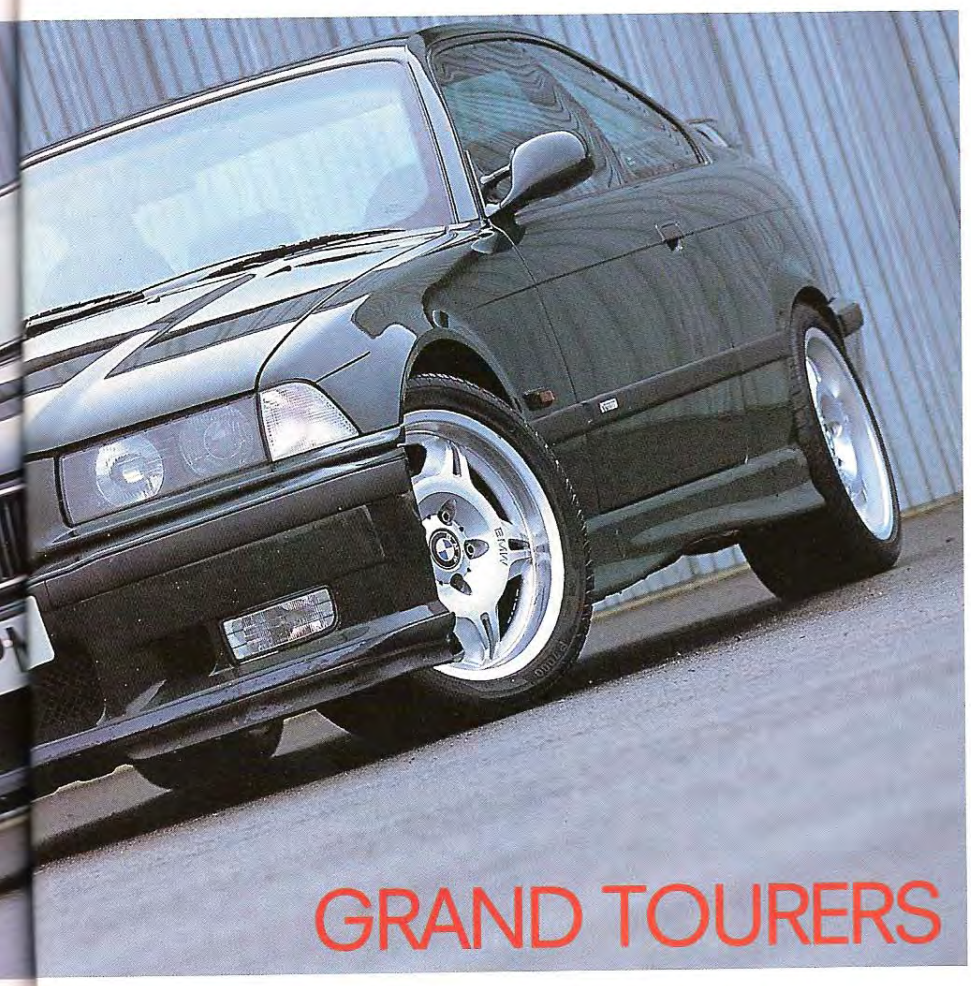
realise it's actually going very well!"

Some testers think BMW's claim of 295bhp is a little pessimistic, so it will be interesting to see how well the GT fares against the clock.

Our final car is an even rarer beast than the GT. Despite much research carried out by Barry when investigating his own car, he'd never seen or heard of a GT2. Apparently, GT2 is the given title on the insurance policy covering the vehicle, but a more accurate name might be an E36 M3 GT Evolution.

Whereas the original GT featured many parts which would eventually be seen on the 3.2 litre M3 Evo, the GT2 doesn't follow

Above: E36 M3 GT only available in British Racing green. Owner not afraid to use and abuse it, though



GRAND TOURERS

a similar tuning progression. In fact, the GT2 seems to be a more commercial version of Barry's GT.

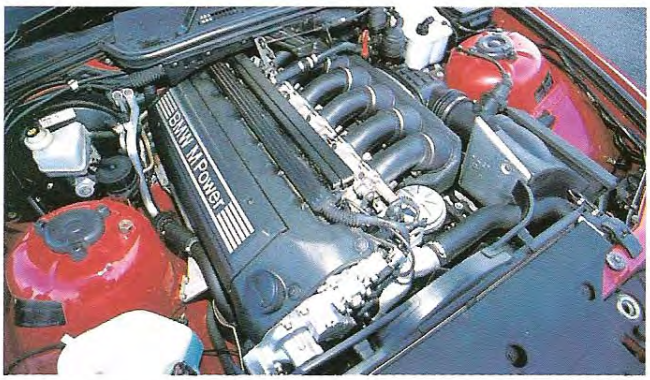
Yes, it features the same aerodynamic parts as the GT, also coming from the Individual production line, but the Imola red paintwork and the lack of BMW Motorsport International decals have sanitised the package. From the conquering formula of the racing version of the E36, maybe the homologated GT2 was born out of necessity rather than want, as BMW updated its racer's 3-Series bodyshell.

Don't get us wrong, the GT2 is still a far more attractive proposition than a regular M3 Evo. Chris Hall, a Weapons Technician with the RAF, certainly enjoys his own little rocket. Like Steve and Barry, he's owned the BMW for a matter of months and was able to buy it from a non-franchised dealer after the insurance company coughed up for his tree-wrapped E36 318i Coupe.

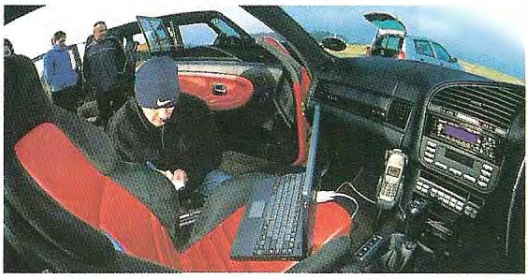
Believe it or not, Chris tells us his GT2 is actually cheaper to insure than the 318i a year ago. Go figure. Chris's car was bought with E46 M3-style 18" alloys, and very nice they look, too, although the original alloys might be preferable.

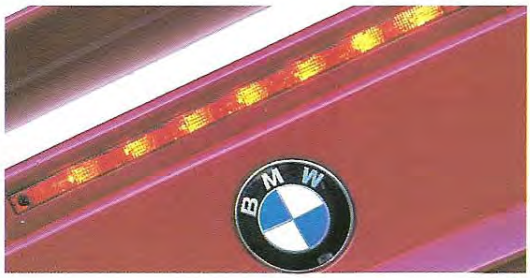
Now it was time to put the owners' money where their mouths were, so to speak. None of our trio had ever pitted their cars against the clock, so were unsure of the winning combination of revs and clutch. Steve found that slipping the clutch a little on his E30 from the start is the way to achieve his quickest times. His second batch of four attempts garnered a set of figures at least half a second quicker across each of the major speed increments.

"I've been thinking about doing some track days, and that's confirmed it!" Barry enthused after completing his first set of runs in the GT. For a guy who was supposed to be worried about the wear on his tyres, his burnout-style take off was an entertaining treat for onlookers. A little chirrup from the tyres is a good idea for quick times but, er... not quite that much,



E36 M3 GT2 essentially an evolution of the GT, with fewer upgrades over regular M3. E46 M3 wheels an afterthought





mate. At least he easily broke the 6sec barrier to 60mph.

Chris went for a completely different method in the GT2. Colloquially known as the granny-style, he dialed in no revs before deploying the clutch. This is mechanically sympathetic but also stopped him getting anywhere near BMW's claimed acceleration figures. After letting his other half, Alison, join him on the second round, his confidence had grown. The data was downloaded on to our laptop, and Chris was delighted to see a 0-60 time one hundredth under six seconds. What did you do that was different, we asked him? "I don't know. Maybe it was the extra little bit of weight..." he joked.

Regardless of the different styles of take off, Chris's figures from 70mph onwards revealed the extra muscle of the 3.2 engine over Barry's uprated 3.0.

Personally, we'd be happy with any one of this rare threesome. As homologated vehicles, they clearly show BMW's prowess on the track, while offering a taste of its ability on the road. So it seems we've been able to prove some special editions are definitely more special than others ●

GRAND TOURERS

ACCELERATION TIMES (SEC)

mph	0-10	0-20	0-30	0-40	0-50	0-60	0-70	0-80	0-90	0-100	quarter mile
E30 M3	0.82	1.70	2.49	3.36	5.01	6.36	8.39	10.39	13.02	16.65	14.94sec at 95.3mph
E36 GT	0.76	1.45	2.14	3.02	4.58	5.81	7.90	9.71	11.65	14.81	14.48sec at 98.9mph
E36 GT2	1.08	1.90	2.64	3.74	4.81	5.99	7.74	9.52	11.43	13.94	14.60sec at 102.2mph