

BMW 535i Gran Turismo



The new 5-series Gran Turismo hatchback looks like a blend of luxury saloon, 4x4 and estate all rolled into one. It has a mean stance, a coupe-like roof line, and an attractive, if rather imposing face.

BMW's answer to making this unusual car is that lots of drivers like the high driving position of an off-roader, but don't want a 4x4 'Chelsea Tractor'. The same goes for those who want the opulence of a 7-series, but would prefer something a little less conservative than an executive saloon.

The 5 GT is higher than a 5-series but lower than an X6 - while being longer than a 5-series Touring but shorter than a 7-series. It also has a substantial 1700-litre boot too which is more than the Touring and just a fraction less than an X5.

Inside, the dashboard is similar to the 7-series' and includes BMW's great iDrive system. The 5 GT has ultra-plush leather upholstery, compartments everywhere and it oozes five star build quality. In five-(SE trim) or four-(Executive) seater formats, there's plenty of room in the back seats and a vast panoramic roof gives rear seat

passengers much more to look at while creating a light and airy feel. Despite being 200mm lower, the car has the same interior headroom as the X5 and there's a clever, split tailgate that can open as a saloon or a full hatchback giving a large flexible load area.

Under the bonnet, the 5 GT's petrol engine is BMW's first engine to combine high-precision direct injection with both mechanically driven variable valve timing and lift and a twin-scroll turbocharger. Even though it's only got one turbo, the engine fits in where the German twin-turbo petrol six would have done, producing 306bhp and an extremely accessible 295lb ft of torque, available from 1200rpm to 5000rpm.

On the road, the 5 GT is creamy smooth with a fantastic eight-speed automatic gearbox fitted as standard.

The big BMW does settle down nicely at cruising speeds though. Maybe that's because that, as standard, the car comes with steel-sprung double-wishbone suspension up front, and air-sprung self-levelling multi-link arrangement at the rear. Also featured as standard is the Dynamic Drive

Control, which influences not only the gearshift dynamics, but also the gas pedal and steering assistance control map. In combination with optional Adaptive Drive, the dampers, with infinite variation on both the inbound and rebound stroke, contribute to the suspension function. In addition to the NORMAL, SPORT and SPORT+ programs, the driver also has the choice of COMFORT mode, available at the touch of a button.

My test of the 5 GT demonstrates that BMW has produced a car with a lot of backbone. It's a bold, high class car, with oodles of refinement and one that's interesting to drive too. However, I reckon that being a passenger is even more interesting, and that's where BMW will score points with fleet buyers. Sitting in the limousine-like rear seat is total luxury and, in my opinion, the best place to be in the 5 GT if you're a high-flyer on your way to a business meeting.

Tim Barnes-Clay

Thanks to Listers BMW Boston, www.listersbostonbmw.co.uk for assisting with this motoring feature.