

# 1 Is it the right car for you?

– marriage guidance



## Tall & short drivers

The E30 was designed for a wide range of sizes, principally to appeal as a family car, and suits short and tall drivers equally. The driver's seat moves up as it moves forward to aid visibility. Width is also well catered for.

## Weight of controls

Models without power assisted steering can feel heavy when parking, particularly if wide tyres are fitted, but once on the move it is light and precise. The pedals are average firmness, nicely progressive in operation and easy to use. The gear stick can sometimes feel a little vague if the bushes have worn, but is generally good and easy to use.

## Will it fit in the garage?

Although slightly larger than its E21 predecessor, the E30 is still small by modern standards. The length of 4325mm is longer than a Golf of that era, but about half a meter shorter than a Ford Mondeo. The width of 1645mm is slightly narrower than its contemporary Golf rival, and about 200mm narrower than the current Mondeo.



**Well proportioned and logically laid out, the interior is easy to use, and easily accommodates a wide range of drivers.**

# 7 Fifteen minute evaluation

– walk away or stay?



## Exterior

- Check that the bumpers are fitted securely as mountings corrode, and if a bumper has been removed previously the bolts may have broken. The chrome trim is prone to corrosion, so if there is bubbling on its surface it may well be worse underneath.
- Look under the lower edge of the sills where they join the floor. Use your probing tool to check for rust behind the underseal. Look along the sills and depress with gloved hands; same for the front and rear parts of the rear wheelarches, too.
- Press the lower corners of the windscreen surround, which can rust from the inside.
- Look at the paint carefully: is it original? Look inside the engine bay for telltale signs of different paint colours. Use the magnet to check the wings are steel not filler.
- The door gaps (shut lines) should be the same width all round without paint chips on the edge.
- Headlights can suffer from a milky build-up on the inside that is difficult to shift. The light mounting brackets suffer from rot, and the adjustment screws can corrode, making adjustment impossible.



**Check that the lights work and that there isn't moisture residue inside the lens. Look through the grille at the integrity of the radiator. Check that the front bumper and trim is secure.**



**Sills and floor corners are most likely rust spots. If possible look behind carpets and trim.**



**White water vapour when starting a cold engine on a cold day is normal, but grey or blue smoke indicates possible engine wear. Whilst looking at the back check the lights, lock and boot for corrosion.**

## Interior

- The edge of the driver's seat suffers the most wear and gives a good indication of the car's mileage.
- Feel the carpet at the four corners; dampness often means the floor has rusted out.

### Exterior trim and parts

Side mirrors are prone to aluminium corrosion, resulting in loss of paint and pitting. They can be repaired by sanding them down and repainting, or be replaced.

Early cars had steel bumpers, which rot from the inside where road debris accumulates; lifting chrome usually hides a large rust patch.



**Check that all the trim parts are present and secure. This car has missing rubbing strips, which are getting harder to find in good condition.**



**BMW roundels are prime targets for thieves. If the plastic starts separating from the back, it will become opaque and the logo may deteriorate.**

### Wipers 4 3 2 1

The windscreen wipers and rear wiper on Touring models can strip gears, preventing them from moving correctly and requiring a replacement wiper motor unit. Another problem is the motor switch failing, which results in the wiper not parking properly. The switch part can be replaced.

**The wipers should operate without squeaks or grinding noises, and also park in the correct position.**



### Sunroof 4 3 2 1

This is prone to rust around the edges. If the seals are perished, moisture may have rotted the mechanism underneath, too. Check for water leaks.

**The sunroof should fit flush with the surrounding roof, and should open and shut easily and not leak.**



### Glass

The window seals perish and crack to allow water in. Moisture in the dash or on the parcel shelf could indicate failed seals.

Door glass seals may have worn, which results in greater wind noise.

Rear quarter light seals also leak, causing water to pool in the side pocket.

If the rear window on Convertible models rattles or whistles at speed, its mounting washers may need adjustment, which is fairly simple.

4 3 2 1

### Lights 4 3 2 1

Headlights can suffer from a milky build-up on the inside that

**Light lenses should be crystal clear. Check the mounts are sound and don't wobble. Check that all the lights work.**



adjusting it. Drum brake models have automatic adjusters. If the lever goes too high, the shoes need replacing.

### Boot interior, spare wheel and tool kit

4 3 2 1

Boot seals perish and let water accumulate in the side sections and spare wheel well. The rear light and number plate holes also corrode and let moisture in. Check the carpet for dampness, then lift out the spare wheel and check the metal underneath.

The spare wheel should have a good usable tyre on. Check for damage and also look across the wheel and check for dents or obvious warping.

The tool kit is attached to the boot lid by a large plastic screw on Saloon and Cabriolet models, and in a bag on the left side behind a plastic panel on Touring models. Sadly, it's common for there to be tools missing; the spanners had the BMW logo cast on and some owners keep one or two as trophies. The quality of the tools was sadly not that great either, and if ever used in anger they may have been damaged. If you are looking for originality, the tool kit must be complete, although individual items often come up for sale, so an incomplete kit could be reinstated. If you are just looking for a practical car then the tool kit is of little consequence, and a reasonably priced general purpose motorist's tool kit from a high-street car accessory shop makes a better practical proposition.

## Mechanicals

### Under-bonnet general impression

4 3 2 1

Check the fluids and if they appear past their best, it may indicate that other service items have also been neglected. All these things help to build a full picture of the car's health.

If there is gunge in the coolant or 'mayonnaise' under the oil filler cap there could be head gasket problems. Pull out the dip-stick and check that the oil level is in the right range – if below the minimum mark it may have been neglected for some time. The oil should be a nice golden colour. If it looks black, it's in desperate need of changing.

Brake fluid should be golden or clear. If it appears grey and very old, the system has been severely neglected.

If the car has power steering, check the oil level, and the same for automatic gearboxes. In both cases the oil should be red; brown would indicate overheating and potentially a mechanical problem.

The rubber intake ducts between the air-box and throttle



**What's the general impression? Leaks and spilled fluids are signs of poor maintenance. Equally, if the engine bay has been pressure washed it may indicate an attempt to hide leaks.**

# 15 Problems due to lack of use

– just like their owners, BMW E30s need exercise!



With cars of this age it is likely that they have spent a few months without use at some point in their lives.

## Underbody corrosion

If a car has stood for any length of time on grass then everything underneath must be examined very carefully. Grass creates a humid environment that rapidly accelerates corrosion, creeping in under any weaknesses in underseal and paint. Exposed metal parts such as brakes and exhaust will be attacked; a new exhaust can be completely destroyed in under a year if the car never moves. Even the clutch will begin to corrode.



**Grass has a habit of eating cars from the bottom up.**

## Seized parts

Cold welding can occur on parts such as piston rings where there is prolonged metal to metal contact. If these parts are operated before first being freed they will rip off some of the metal surface, which will accelerate wear. Door hinges and locks will similarly seize. Alloy wheels can bond so tightly to the hub that the wheel could be damaged when trying to remove it.

Over time rubber can bond very firmly to metal or glass, so things like brake piston seals, valve stem seals and strut rod seals may seize and become damaged when first operated. Similarly, windscreen wipers can bond to the screen and rip apart on first operation. Even the fan belt will settle into the shape it was in when the engine last stopped.

Brakes can also bind. If the handbrake was left on then the friction material may have bonded to the drum, and forcing it loose may rip the surface of the handbrake shoe. The disc surface will have corroded; it's bare metal so it doesn't take long for a light surface rust to appear. If the car has stood for a long time corrosion may be



**This fuel pump assembly is corroding and its mounting brackets are weak. Check all components underneath if the car has stood for a long time.**



**This brake disc has light surface corrosion due to being static for a few months. If corrosion was any more severe than this, the disc would need to be resurfaced or replaced.**