

Roundel

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1965 3200 CS

Resurrected Elegance

John F. Kennedy was beginning his ninth month as President, *Tossin' and Turnin'* by Bobby Lewis topped the hit-parade charts, and New York Yankees outfielder Roger Maris was about to break Babe Ruth's home-run record when BMW introduced the elegant 3200 CS coupe at the 1961 Frankfurt Auto Show.

It was arguably the most important exhibition in the company's history.

An odd assortment of vehicles greeted showgoers at BMW's stand, evidence of the

Decayed and rusting when he found it, Don Dethlefsen's prize-winning coupe is a testimony to the restorer's art.

Story by
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company's identity crisis, which was largely responsible for its first postwar near-death experience less than two years earlier. Egg-shaped Isettas, tiny 700 coupes, and the virtually sale-proof 502 sedan—dubbed the Baroque Angel—surrounded the 3200. But despite the coupe's sensual good looks, penned by Italian designer Nuccio Bertone, most of the public's attention focused on another BMW making its debut: the 1500 sedan. That moderately-priced four-door originated the sports-sedan concept and launched

BMW's rise to become one of the world's most admired—and profitable—carmakers.

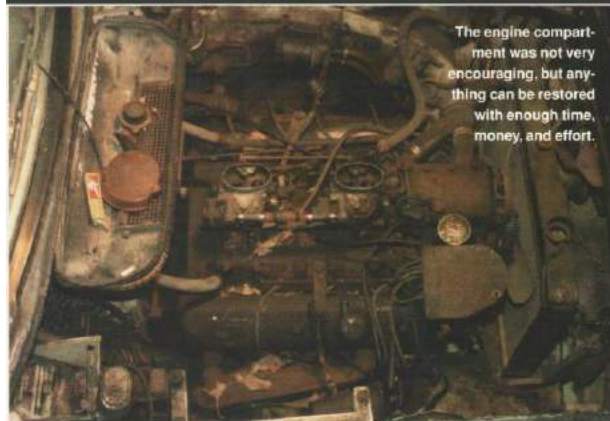
As the 1500 began a new chapter in BMW's history, the 3200 CS closed the book on another. The graceful coupe was the last in a line of largely unprofitable V8-powered luxury sedans, sports cars, and coupes built throughout the '50s and early '60s, when despite the harsh economic and social realities of postwar Europe, BMW management thought these high-priced models were necessary to build the company's image. In

late 1959, Munich contracted Bertone—later famous for his Lamborghini Miura, Lancia Stratos, and Fiat X 1/9, among many other notable designs—to style an updated coupe around the 503 chassis.

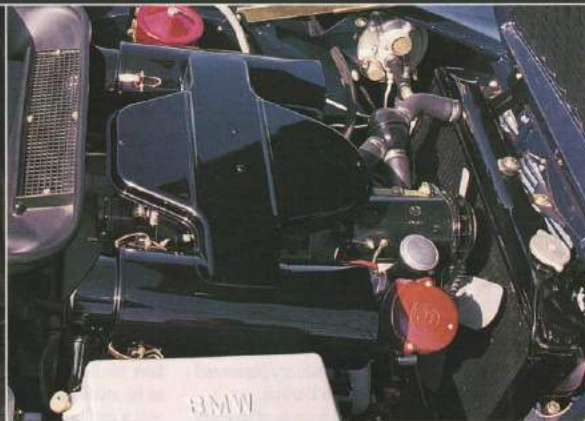
The result was a distinctive shape that defined certain design elements of BMW coupes for the next three decades, especially the tall greenhouse with its thin A and C pillars. It was also the first to carry the BMW emblem on its C pillars. Its interior was supremely luxurious, with eye-pleasing design



3200 CS PRODUCTION	
Year	Cars
1962	83
1963	138
1964	267
1965	115
Total	603



The engine compartment was not very encouraging, but anything can be restored with enough time, money, and effort.



details from a sweeping instrument panel and sumptuously comfortable seats to its 507-roadster-inspired steering wheel. Coupes built in the first two years of the 3200's production run had painted dashboards that were superseded by wood trim for the final two years. Round-tail-light 2002 fanatics may not know it, but the trademark turn-signal lamp inside the larger brake light design that sets their venerated cars apart from later 2002s first appeared on Bertone's 3200.

To save as much production space as possible for the new 1500, which the BMW brass hoped would be a runaway success, Bertone built the 3200 bodies and interiors, largely by hand, at its Turin, Italy, work-

shops. Completed bodies were then shipped to the Milbertshofen plant where they were attached to 503 chassis with a 507 roadster rear axle and given the latest 3.2-liter, 160-horsepower V8 engine, good enough to provide the 3,300-pound coupe a top speed of 124 mph and make a 0-60 mph sprint in a shade under eleven seconds.

Befitting a limited-production grand touring coupe, well-heeled customers—many of them celebrities—could order special details to personalize their cars. The most famous example was a one-off cabriolet with a power soft-top and power steering built for BMW majority shareholder Herbert Quandt. Between spring of 1962 and autumn of 1965,

BMW built only 603 coupes; each had a base price of \$7,500, about \$2,000 more than a contemporary Chevrolet Corvette.

Despite its beauty, the 3200 was a continual source of headaches for BMW. In *The BMW Story: A Company In Its Time*, Horst Mönlich tells about an encounter at the 1965 Frankfurt Auto Show, when BMW chairman Paul Hahnemann confessed to Glas chairman Anderl Glas, "I can take you to a big room in Milbertshofen and show you nothing but files, files of complaints about Bertone! If the car's mechanics are built here and the body is brought from Italy, it turns out a disaster! Why? If anyone has an accident and needs a new door, then it



A rusted hulk when it came from California, Don Dethlefsen's BMW 3200 went on to win the Oktoberfest 2000 concours.

takes three months to get there [from Italy], and then it never fits! It'll be a centimeter short in one place and two in another. As they're hammered out on wooden tools, no two items are the same."

A handful of 3200s made the trip across the Atlantic to the United States, primarily through Max Hoffman, the Austrian-born wheeler-dealer operating out of his swank Park Avenue showroom in New York City—Hoffman eventually became BMW's sole U.S. importer—Fadex, a New York and California-based import company; and, in a few cases, American military personnel or tourists returning from Europe.

Although there are no records of its early life, the 1965 coupe bearing chassis number 76528 ended up parked behind a restoration shop in Sacramento, California—for fifteen years. The earliest available records show that a woman in Salinas owned it from 1977 to 1980. She sold it to a gentleman whose intention was to restore it, but for whatever reason, he never started the project. Windy City Chapter's Don Dethlefsen saw the coupe advertised in *Hemmings Motor News* in early 1996.

"I've always liked the 3200's body style," says Dethlefsen, who has a collection of six other vintage and historic BMWs. "I like restoring cars that aren't the rare, collectable models that everyone and his brother are after. I prefer the limited-production cars that are interesting but somehow slipped through

the cracks." He put down a \$500 deposit on the coupe, sight unseen. "Of course, I saw photos," he laughs. "The shop owner represented the car fairly; with the exception of a missing rear bumper, the car was complete. He said it was restorable, but it would take a ton of money to do it."

Dethlefsen took his stunning 2000 CS coupe to Laguna Seca as part of the 1996 Monterey Historic Races where BMW was the featured marque. After the weekend's festivities, he and his wife, Sue, drove to Sacramento to collect the 3200. Five years later, his face still reflects the disappointment as he recalls seeing it for the first time. "It was a rust bucket," he says with a grimace. "On a scale from one to ten, I'd give it a two. But I thought at worst I could part it out for what I paid for it. Anyway, I had two grand in my pocket for the balance. So that was the motivation for dragging it back to Chicago."

The hulk sat in Dethlefsen's shop for another six months while he finished work on his 1800 TiSA sedan. Then it was the coupe's turn. "Whenever we took something off, we'd stand back and shake our heads," he says. "It got worse and worse. We took the carpets out—and the floor was rotted. We took the sunroof out—and the tracks were rotted. In the engine compartment, the rain gutters on each side were gone. You could look right through the fenders. The entire trunk was rotted out. We put it up on the lift and found the frame was rusted."

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Manufactured	1962-1965
Examples produced	603
Original price	\$7,500
Engine type	V8
Bore x stroke, mm	82 x 75
Displacement, cc	3,168
Fuel system	Dual Zenith 36 NDIX twin down-draft carburetors
Compression ratio	9:1
Valve arrangement	Overhead
Hp, bhp @ rpm	160 @ 5,600
Clutch	Single disc dry clutch
Gearbox	4 forward, 1 reverse, steering column or central gearshift
Rear axle ratio	3.70 or 3.90
Front suspension	Twin wishbone, torsion bars, anti-roll bar
Rear suspension	Rigid axle, tension struts and thrust rods, torsion bars, Panhard rod
Brakes	Hydraulic front discs, rear drums, servo assist
Wheels	5J x 15
Tires	7.00H 15 or 185 HR 15
Wheelbase, in.	111.4
Track front/rear, in.	52.3/55.5
L x W x H, in.	190.1 x 67.7 x 57.4
Empty weight, lb.	3,307
Top speed, mph	124

Source: BMW Mobile Tradition



It took three weeks to disassemble the car, with Dethlefsen's enthusiasm for the project diminishing each day. But then two events rekindled his fervor: He invited three restoration experts to his shop to render an opinion. They felt that the coupe, although rough, was not beyond hope. Shortly afterwards, a trip

Dethlefsen Reunites Twins Separated at Birth

It's not uncommon for someone who pursues a hobby with all the enthusiasm and skill that Don Dethlefsen puts into restoring vintage BMWs to hear, "You should go into the business." Although he has a day job as president of a successful trucking company, he decided to take that advice and help others share in the excitement of owning a Munich classic.

The paint was barely dry on The Werk Shop's shingle last January when customers started calling. Dethlefsen, together with three highly experienced BMW restorers, provides complete restoration services, from locating a suitable car to delivering the restored jewel to its owner's garage. His role is project management, including tracking down cars, finding parts, and advising clients on all aspects of restoration.

"Every project is an adventure," he says. Take, for example, the one he's working on now. A customer wants two 1973 2002 Tii's: one perfectly restored, in original condition, as a show car; the other completely restored but built as a dual-purpose, ultra-prepared street and track car. Dethlefsen started the hunt and eventually located two worthy cars, one in Los Angeles, the other in San Diego. By coincidence, both were painted Ceylon gold.

Examining the cars' documentation, he discovered they shared much more than just a common color. "It turns out these cars were built on the same day and are only six serial numbers apart," he says. "They could see each other on the assembly line! I don't know what the chances are of finding two nearly 30-year old cars like this, but it's a wonderful story that makes this collection that much more special."

to Germany to attend a vintage BMW meet netted a wealth of information, parts sources, and invaluable contacts. "The postwar V8s are popular with German collectors," he says. "I discovered that just about everything is available. It's not always easy to find, but if you do a lot of digging, you can find just about every part you need. If you can't find it, you make it. It's not that difficult." He also paid a visit to BMW Mobile Tradition in Munich, where he spent the good part of a day combing through records.

When he returned to Chicago, work began in earnest. Dethlefsen bought a second 3200, chassis number 76433, in Oregon for parts. "To be honest, that car was the better of the two," he says. "If we weren't so far into the project on the first coupe, I would have restored the parts car." While work proceeded on the body, interior, and chassis, veteran BMW engine ace Tom Kelly rebuilt the coupe's V8, obtaining parts from "old timer" shops in Germany and Switzerland. The refurbished powerplant runs so smoothly it barely makes any noise at idle.

Deciding on a color presented another challenge. "I looked at the original BMW colors and nothing really excited me. To be honest, they're boring," Dethlefsen says with absolute finality. "Many coupes were made in white or beige, but the car does not show well in a light color." While in Germany, he was surprised to learn that coupe owners there shared his opinion. A dark-

blue 3200 at the event caught his eye. "I know it's subjective," he says, "but to me, that's the perfect color for the car."

The most difficult pieces to find during the three-year project were backup lights and an ignition switch and key. The lights turned out to be Italian; they were also used on period Alfa Romeos and Ferraris. He found them in Italy after a two-year search. The ignition switch proved to be equally elusive. "I literally had no key for the car, and the

ignition switch was shot. I was resigned to go to Oktoberfest [2000], where I first showed the car, with a jury-rigged screwdriver in the ignition switch." But a new switch and key arrived from Germany three days before he left for Spartanburg.

At O'Fest, the coupe took first place in the concours competition and was the People's Choice winner, proof of its captivating beauty. But how does this beauty drive? "I think 'elegant' is the best word to describe it," Dethlefsen says. "In some ways it was the 7 Series of its time. It had all the bells and whistles—smooth V8 engine with dual carburetion, electric windows, fancy Becker Mexico radio. Its suspension gives an incredibly smooth ride. It's a fabulous car to drive. Its top end is fast, and it's no slouch getting up there. The four-speed manual transmission is very easy to shift. Best of all, it has that magical 'hook' that all BMWs seem to have. Each model is a little different, but once you have one, you never want to go away from them." ♦

