

PROFESSIONAL Driver



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NEW MERCEDES-BENZ E220D SE 9G-TRONIC



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ALL THE LATEST CARS



Stuart Newport: "When I've worn mine out in a couple of years, I'd definitely get one."

Many thanks to the Hatherley Manor Hotel for use of their premises for our photo shoot. <http://www.hatherleymanor.co.uk/>

Generation game

Mark Bursa



WE ARE IN A PRIVILEGED position at *Professional Driver* of being able to access all the latest cars for the chauffeur and private hire market—often before

they go on sale.

We test them thoroughly, but once they've been around for a few years, they tend to drop off the radar until a replacement is ready—we're never short of cars to test!

So while we often compare competing products, we don't tend to look at a new model side-by-side with the car it replaced. And we thought that might be a good idea.

We've been testing the latest BMW 730Ld for the past couple of months, and it's certainly proving to be something of a hit in the market. In the first two months of 2016, BMW sold a total of 6,506 7-series, an increase of 21.6% compared with the same period in 2015. It's posing a serious challenge to the market-leading Mercedes-Benz S-Class.

Chauffeur Stuart Newport of SNC Cars has been running one of the last old-shape 730Lds for the past six months. He's been chauffeuring for 20 years, but this is his first BMW. "I was a loyal Mercedes man for 19 years," he says, running a variety of S-Class and E-Class models.

He admits he switched to BMW simply because he was able to secure a finance deal on a 7-series that Mercedes couldn't match. "I'd been running E-Classes because of the recession, but I wanted to get back into a big, long-wheelbase car," he says. "An ex-demo S-Class came out at £60,000, but this cost me around £42,000." Such is the benefit of timing a purchase at the end of a quarter, when a model is on run-out!

Stuart changed brands with a certain amount of trepidation—as customers had traditionally asked for "a Mercedes". He needn't have worried. "It's the best car I've had," he says. "Smooth, comfortable and large, and fully loaded with toys for the customer!"

And some of Stewart's clients even admitted they preferred the BMW to the Mercedes, as they drove BMWs themselves.

Our test car is a slightly different specification to

Stewart's car, as it has M Sport trim. This doesn't necessarily mean it's a more sporty car, but it does have a more aggressive look, and also features large 20in wheels—not necessarily an advantage for a chauffeur, as low-profile tyres tend to do little for the ride quality. Standard SE trim offers 18in rims, with fatter tyres.

There's certainly enough familiarity about the old 7-series and the new model, even though the new car is almost entirely new.

Stewart's first impressions are favourable. The car looks good—especially at the back. "Rear end styling has just got better and better on the 7-series. Three generations ago it was pretty ugly," he says.

He's impressed inside. "I like the dashboard layout—it's cleaner than before. And he immediately noticed a lighter feel to the steering at lower speeds, making the new 7-series very manoeuvrable around urban roads. "When you accelerate to motorway speed, you can feel it tightening up, which is what you want at speed," he says.

Ride feels "similar"—and that's with the low-profile rims. "I expect it would be noticeably smoother with the same tyres as on my car," he says. Noise and general

OLD V NEW
BMW 730Ld

head
2head

refinement is “very good”—and not greatly different to Stewart’s own car.

The sat-nav is repositioned in the new car—but the system is basically the same. It has a useful traffic-flow feature, highlighting whether there are delays on major roads by highlighting them with different colours—green for clear; yellow, amber and red for different degrees of traffic delays. It’s great in the daytime, but less so at night. “I’ve got to have it on, but at night it’s like a bag of glow-worms—you’ve no idea where you are!” he says. “Take it off and you end up with a map you can actually see.”

Stuart liked the ambient lighting feature, and the illuminated floor lighting that lights up the pavement alongside the car. And the massage seat is something he’d use “all the time!”

One of the “toys” fitted to Stewart’s car is a head-up display, and that’s something he says he’d now struggle to do without. Not only does it keep your speed at the forefront of your attention, it also gives clear navigation instructions direct into your line of sight—no need to glance at the main screen all the time.

“The new HUD is improved over mine,” he says. Not only does it have more colours, it also adds functions, such as a warning system that tells you that you’re exceeding the speed limit by changing the speed indication from white to red. “Very useful!” says Stewart.

The boot is big enough to accommodate three large cases standing up—Stuart hasn’t had a problem with the old car’s boot. Rear seat comfort is good, though the seating position is a little too high. “I prefer to sit lower

FACTFILE

THE OLD

2015 BMW 730LD SE EXECUTIVE

ENGINE	3.0-litre straight-six turbodiesel
TRANSMISSION	8-speed auto, RWD
POWER	258bhp at 4,000rpm
TORQUE	560Nm at 1,500rpm
COMBINED FUEL ECONOMY	50.4mpg
CO ₂ EMISSIONS	148g/km
LENGTH	5,219mm
WIDTH	1,902mm
HEIGHT	1,487mm
WHEELBASE	3,210mm
BOOT SPACE	500 litres
FUEL TANK	80 litres
WARRANTY	3 years/unlimited mileage
VED BAND	F

THE NEW

2016 BMW 730LD M SPORT

ENGINE	3.0-litre straight six turbodiesel
TRANSMISSION	8-speed steptronic, 4WD
POWER	265bhp at 4,000rpm
TORQUE	620Nm at 2,000rpm
COMBINED FUEL ECONOMY	56.5mpg
CO ₂ EMISSIONS	132g/km
LENGTH	5,248mm
WIDTH	1,902mm
HEIGHT	1,478mm
WHEELBASE	3,210mm
BOOT SPACE	515 litres
FUEL TANK	78 litres
WARRANTY	3 years / unlimited mileage
VED BAND	E

in the car,” Stuart says.

Overall, he’s impressed. “When I’ve worn mine out in a couple of years, I’d definitely get one,” he says. “As a drive, it’s beautiful. The steering is lighter when you’re going slower—overall, comfort is about the same. But the car is a touch better all round.”

Would he go back to Mercedes? “Not on price,” he says. And other brands don’t quite match the 7-series or S-Class in the back. “The Audi A8 is a nice car, but it feels a little smaller in the back.”

Stuart rarely keeps cars beyond the 3-year warranty

period. He covers around 100,000 miles a year, so tends to change cars after 200,000 miles or so. “Things tend to go wrong as soon as the warranty ends, so I tend to get out before that. I’ll see how I get on with BMW when the car gets a bit older,” he says.

“The new 7-series is excellent, and an improvement over the previous model, as you’d expect. But I wouldn’t choose an M Sport model over the SE Exclusive trim level for the sake of the customer, as the rear seats are better, and less high, and the ride is better on the smaller wheels,” Stuart concludes.

