



Blip the throttle and the noise is pure NASCAR racer

two clicks to the right and you hear pumps beginning to power up — the systems all coming on line ready for action. Then thumb the engine start button.

If the noise coming from the big V8 as it fires into life is soft, then I'm from another planet. A guttural roar greets your ears as the engine kicks up revs slightly, before settling down to a menacing, burbling idle. Blip the throttle and the noise is pure NASCAR racer, all supplemented by some satisfying banging and popping from the big twin exhaust pipes. All very enticing stuff.

Then there are the wheels. If, like me, you're looking and thinking they are not Alpina's trademark 20-spokers, look again. Although it's not the typical Alpina alloy style, the five groups of four do ensure we have the traditional spoke count. But it is more the tyres that should be the focus — 35 profile

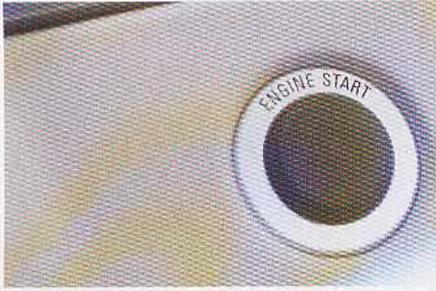
fronts, unbelievable 30 profile rears, they're hardly going to give a cossetting ride.

Alpina also fits its trademark dampers and springs to the car, although the Buchloe firm's attention to detail is such that every damper-spring combination they fit to a BMW is optimised to each individual car. The Roadster has different spring rates to a B3S, for example.

How could anyone dismiss this car as too soft? As we head away from Sytner and out towards the south-east of Nottingham, it's quickly apparent that this is no wallowing mess. Don't get me wrong, the ride is certainly comfortable but it's probably erring more on the side of sporting than cruising. Our pot-holed road surfaces don't help, and at first I'm wondering how it would feel to do a long, sustained motorway journey in the Roadster. It's only later, as the road surfaces improve,

that I realise I was perhaps a bit harsh on the Alpina — it's certainly smoother than I was expecting from such a specialist car. More time is needed, though, to see how it fares over long distances and varying surfaces.

But the real key to the Alpina is the manner of its performance. It's a little slower outright than the Z8 to 60 mph. Although it's faster eventually, it is limited to 166 mph as it would need a rear spoiler to negate aerodynamic lift at higher speeds, but Alpina doesn't want to spoil the Z8's lines and so hasn't fitted one. Yet it has a useful extra 14 lbf.ft of torque right in the middle of its rev range which makes the car much more tractable around town and, mated to the Switchtronic, it's also a lot easier to execute smooth, low-speed manoeuvres. The Roadster V8 certainly does not complain about the three-point turns and slow driving we ask of it for the >



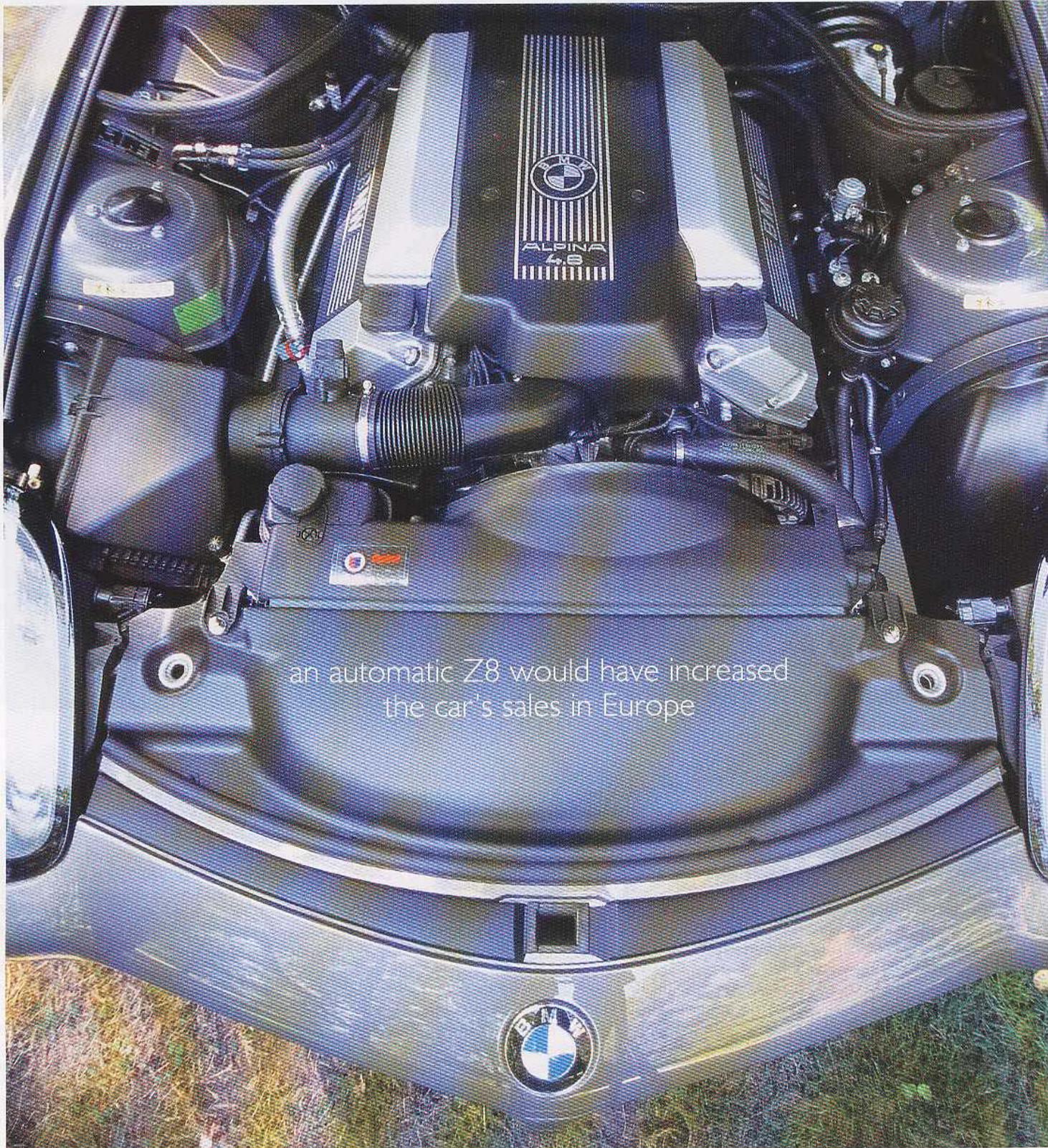
shoot, so living with it in day-to-day driving conditions doesn't look problematic.

Is it slow-witted, then? Well, punch the throttle down to the floor and if you're in full auto mode, the 'box takes a second or so before kicking down and letting loose all 381 nags. It's not razor-sharp response, but it is very entertaining waiting during that brief moment for all hell to break loose. And break loose it does. Once the 'box has finished stirring itself to respond to your heavy right-foot

inputs, the Alpina begins to increase speed at an indecent accelerative rate.

The car can go from 30 mph to mumble-mumble mph in the blink of an eye, and the noise while it does so is simply fantastic. The exhausts blare, DSC kicks in and the V8 effortlessly powers the light car away with massive traction and plenty of attitude.

Like all other Alpinas, it corners flat and true, and it has phenomenal grip, thanks in part to its big fat Michelins. The standard Z8



an automatic Z8 would have increased the car's sales in Europe