



35,000-MILE TEST



J.G. RUSSELL

Long-Term BMW M3

Fast, fluid, full of flair—but it could use the kryptonite wheel option.

BY MARTIN PADGETT JR.

It grabbed a spot on the Ten Best list. It won a recent comparison test with a near-perfect score. Most editors, given the chance, would adopt Jim Carrey as their personal savior in return for a stint behind the wheel. Need any more hints as to how we feel about the BMW M3?

Perhaps reliving the details of our long-term relationship with one might provide the final puzzle piece. In just 12 weeks, we'd used up half our allotted term, 17,500 miles, on the M3's odo. It ran a marathon from New York to Montana, shuttled weekenders to Toronto, and reeled off some 6000 miles circling the Canadian

Maritime Provinces as if it were an integral part of the NORAD defense system.

By then our early impressions of the M3 were set in stone. The car has marvelous torque, tossable handling, and astounding brakes. It also has direct and faithful steering, despite the wide-load Michelin MXX3 40-series tires. The top gear is so flexible that when you hit "resume" on the cruise control, the M3 pulls strongly enough to tip your head back.

Some minor chinks in the near-flawless armor did reveal themselves, however. The M3's low-profile tires tend to jink on con-

crete pavement, and the engine clatters at idle on cold starts before the hydraulic tappets pump up. Still, the biggest problem was getting a reservation on our sign-out board, since most staffers attacked its slot like homesteaders headed for Oklahoma.

After we hit "engage" for the test track, the underbody shields promptly blew off at 120 mph. Yikes! We ordered replacements, but they would take a while to come.

BMW installs a self-determining service indicator in all its cars, and our yellow LEDs lit up and called for the first visit to the dealer at 9500 miles. Wary Larry Griffin hunted for a BMW shop on the fly