

replaced. More seriously, the coolant-warning level tipped us off to a deteriorating water pump. The pump was covered by warranty, the oil-and-filter service cost \$27.48, and the new outside mirror and fog lamps ran \$604.36—again, an accident cost you won't see in the spec column. That's the price you pay for power mirrors and low-slung lighting.

A set of Bridgestone Winter Radial WT-05 tires kept our M3 on a true heading during the onset of winter. Squirmier and less grippy in the dry than the OE rubber, the heavy-duty shoes gave much-needed stability in crosswinds and on patchy ice.

Two incidents marred the M3's last days with us. You guessed it—we bent another wheel, for a total of five star-crossed rims. "And this car makes an awful noise when it hits," Schroeder moaned. This time, we didn't buy a new wheel—we instead sent it off to the Wheel Collision Center (see sidebar). We also lost another set of underbody shrouds in final testing, costing \$161.97 to replace.

Bad luck with the alloys, mirror, and

underbody shields notwithstanding, the M3 soldiered quickly and rather painlessly through 35,000 miles of decidedly enthusiastic driving. We did notice minor trim problems—a plastic seatbelt housing broke off, the dash sprouted a gap

between its edge and the central fresh-air vent, and a slight whistle cropped up around the middle of the frameless driver-side window. But acceleration times and grip remained about the same, while braking improved a bit, to 160 feet.

We've rarely been as mesmerized with a car as we have been with the M3. Its siren song—240 horsepower, graceful lines, and fluid handling—is sweet indeed. Never mind the cost of wheels and tires, where's the damn key?

Vehicle type: front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 2-door sedan

Price as tested: \$38,375 (base price: \$36,642)

Engine type: DOHC 24-valve 6-in-line, iron block and aluminum head, Bosch engine-control system with port fuel injection

Displacement	182 cu in, 2990cc
Power (SAE net)	240 bhp @ 6000 rpm
Torque (SAE net)	225 lb-ft @ 4250 rpm
Transmission	5-speed
Wheelbase	106.3 in
Length	174.9 in
Curb weight	3232 lb
Performance:	new 35,000 miles
Zero to 60 mph	5.5 sec 5.5 sec
Zero to 100 mph	14.7 sec 14.5 sec
Zero to 130 mph	28.7 sec 29.4 sec
Street start, 5-60	6.2 sec 6.0 sec
Standing 1/4-mile	14.2 sec 14.2 sec
	@ 98 mph @ 99 mph
Braking, 70-0 mph	162 ft 160 ft
Roadholding, 300-ft-dia skidpad	0.81 g 0.81 g
Top speed	137 mph 137 mph
EPA fuel economy, city driving	19 mpg
C/D observed fuel economy	24 mpg
Unscheduled oil additions	2 qt

Service and repair stops:

Scheduled	3
Unscheduled	2

Operating costs (for 35,000 miles):

Service	\$375
Normal wear	\$0
Repair	\$353
Gasoline (@ \$1.13 per gallon)	\$1679
Life expectancies (extrapolated from 35,000-mile test):	
Tires	36,500 miles
Front brake pads	65,500 miles
Rear brake pads	72,500 miles

Don't Throw Away That Wounded Wheel

At \$441 each, the aluminum alloy wheels on our long-term BMW M3 cost more than the first cars of a couple of gray-beard staffers around here. Worse, when combined with the thin sidewall of a 40-series tire, a Michigan pothole can prove fatal to these zooty wheels. We know—in seven months, potholes bent five of our M3's rims.

In the past, we'd be stuck for the price of new wheels. Now comes the Wheel Collision Center of Bath, Pennsylvania, a three-year-old company that says it can repair bent, cracked, gouged, or broken aluminum wheels. Since his patents are pending, company president Daryl Robbins wouldn't pass out the recipe for his process. But basically, Robbins said controlled heat is used to soften the wheel, and special machines

then reshape it. The last step is to completely refinish the wheel.

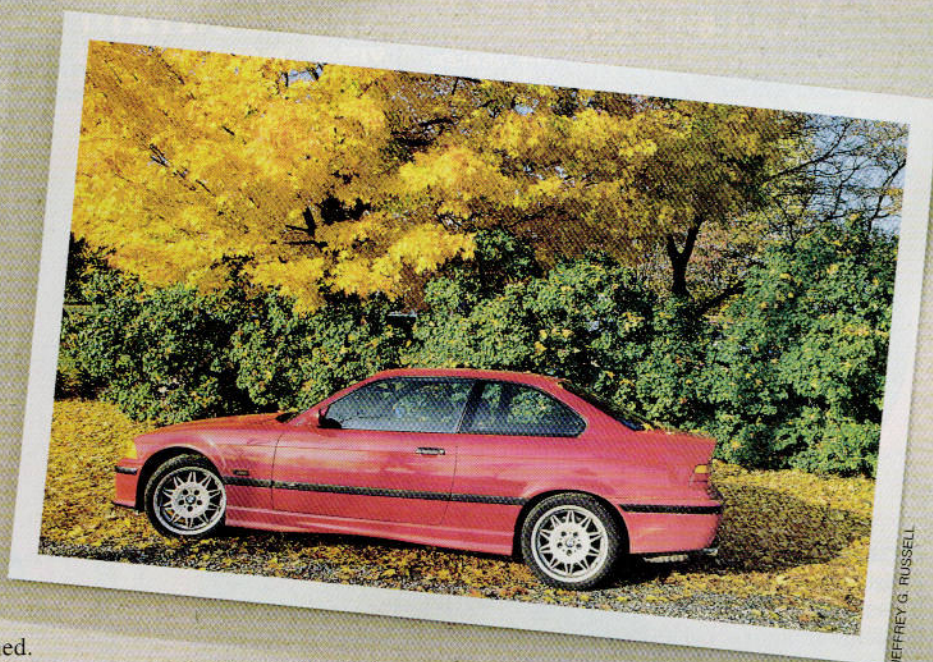
We sent one of our wounded wheels, crunched at the outer top edge of the rim, to the Wheel Collision Center. The repaired wheel we received back looked as good as new. In addition, extensive testing at Lehigh University demonstrated that the strength and shape of a wheel repaired by Robbins's company equaled the original's.

Repair costs vary, though \$100 to \$150 per wheel appears to be in the ballpark. Ours set us back \$138.25. The telephone number is 800-292-RIMS.

—Larry Webster



JEFFREY G. RUSSELL



JEFFREY G. RUSSELL