

There is another penetration into the sacred inner sanctum of the BMW engine: the cap on top of the engine, with the little oil can on it, which I think is where someone puts in new oil when needed. Mark Jon, do not worry: Probably only 3er and 2002 owners, plus some other BMW gearheads, actually know how to check the oil anyway, so the new no-dipstick is a great nanny for the others.

I do have an issue with the system's oil-condition-evaluation capability, however. My 2011 335is (six-speed manual) has 8,500 miles, and I changed the oil after a break-in period and again 6,000 miles later. The onboard computer's service-required information has not changed: 15,000 miles, now by 7/2013 (the system forgets about annual oil changes; I took Euro delivery in August 2011). Both Blackstone Labs oil-analysis reports clearly indicated the benefits of these oil changes, removing all the break-in metals that are still showing up in the oil, and which would cause increased wear on this beautiful engine if I waited until the "free" BMW service at 15,000 miles. As for cost considerations, the same metals go through the twin turbos that have the additional twenty horsepower for the "is" version; the engine oil lubes the twin turbos.

As for Mark Jon's wish for a low-oil warning, unfortunately, BMW must have forgotten that they used to have one: My original-owner 1985 325e coupe (all I could afford when I bought it in Germany, where I was stationed as a U.S. Air Force officer), five-speed manual, 175,000 miles, has an onboard computer with a low-oil warning light that still works, and faithfully lights when the engine is 2/3-quart low. The longevity of this device since December 1984 might also give some comfort to people uncertain about having no dipstick in a more modern BMW.

Bob Bassetti
Austin, Texas

CALABRESE'S DISAPPEARING DIPSTICK II

I like Mark Jon Calabrese; he's a down-to-earth kind of guy, and I think his comments about finding joy in oil-level sensors are probably accurate. That is the way the world is going to go: sensors everywhere. Pretty soon we won't have to sense anything, because sensors will be sensing in place of our senses.

That dear old dipstick: What do you think it was meant for? Do you actually think its primary function is to see if your engine is burning or leaking oil by a reduced meniscus level? My God, if you can't figure that out by looking at blue exhaust smoke or drippings on the garage floor, you shouldn't be driving. No, no: That lit-



THERE'S A FUTURE IN YOUR FJORD

Imagine a motorhead's dismay when presented with a Prius at the rental agency on the west coast of Norway: yes, an ugly moment. We had envisioned waving the credit card around and snaring a Volvo C30 or a VW Golf TDi, and then winding our spirited way in and around the fjords, only stopping for the occasional troll-sighting or lutefisk snack. But it was not to be: Everything was taken but the Prius and a Yaris (shudder). Take your pick.

Thus it was that the automotive high point of our scenic Norwegian vacation was not our own lumpen and sluggish vehicle, but an extraordinary sighting of BMW owners we encountered in a remote village on an arm of Norway's largest fjord, the Sognefjord. We had arrived at the lovely Tørvis Hotel in Marifjøra and were sipping a couple of ridiculously expensive lattes—Norway is not for the financially fainthearted—when suddenly I demanded of my husband, "Hey, honey, which BMW is the little convertible with the door that drops down?"

"Why?" he asked, turning to look.

"Because I just saw one. Wait, there's another—and another! And that's four... five... six... seven... eight of them!"

It turned out that a pair of Norwegian brothers, each with his own Z1, had organized a Z1-owners' group of six other couples from Germany for a driving tour of the spectacular west coast of Norway, and they were all pulling into the tiny parking lot of the same hotel where we were spending the night. The Z1 (say "Zed-One" if you are in Europe), they recounted with great enthusiasm, was produced for three years, between 1989 and 1991, and had a total production run of only 8,000 cars. They were never exported to the U.S., though some have been brought over by collectors. So those eight Z1s represented 0.1% of the total production! One was even an Alpina, of which there are fewer than a hundred.

When we told them that we were fellow BMW enthusiasts, they asked us if we would like them to line up their cars for a picture. Who were we to turn down such an offer? The hotel allowed them to drive up on the front lawn so that the fjord and the mountains could serve as a backdrop. While my husband directed traffic, arranging the colors of the cars to his artistic satisfaction, I resembled a shady street-corner hawker with eight different cameras dangling from my arms and neck so I could commemorate the moment for everyone.

The result was much laughter, this beautiful picture, and a warm international cultural exchange. But then, motorheads everywhere speak the same language.

Ingrid Steffensen and Jeffrey Bruce
Short Hills, New Jersey

tle dipstick is actually a sampling device. When you pull out the dipstick, it's like a nurse taking a blood sample from a patient; the oil is the lifeblood of your engine. When you get your physical once every year, and they do a lipids panel, you know what I mean. So: You behold the little drop of oil at the end of your sampling hypodermic, the dipstick, and check its color. If necessary, compare it to the color of fresh oil when both are placed on a white 3x5 card.

Now, don't get too excited if the oil turns somewhat dark very shortly after a change, because detergent oils will do that. Just know how much color is bad. If it's really black and opaque, you have a problem. And check for greenish, bubble-ish microdroplets sitting up farther: This is

condensed water, either from blow-by due to bad rings, or a partially blown head gasket.

Now rub that oil between your fingers. Did you know that rubbing oil between the thumb and forefinger can detect a gritty feel from particles only five to ten micrometers in diameter? If you feel grit, then you have a defective or clogged oil filter, or some large source of particulate matter in the system. But more than that, as you squash down beyond the "grit point," you begin to feel the "stick-slip" behavior of the oil, which tells you a bit of its lubrication ability. Compare this feeling to the same "squashed-rubbing" feeling with fresh oil, and see the difference. If the used oil does not allow your fingers to move easily, the oil is dead.