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## BMW's New 3 Series

[Dan Lienert](#)

**BMW** has unveiled details and photos of its overhauled **3 Series** line, which will go on sale in the United States early next summer (possibly in May or June).

The first new 3 Series models will be sedans. Eventually, other body styles currently employed by the range--coupes, convertibles, wagons and the high-performance **M3** line of coupes and convertibles--will follow.

No estimated price is available for the new 3 Series, but the current sedan starts at \$29,995 (including destination charge). With its performance due to increase thanks to new engines, the 3 Series' price could go up as well.


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The current 3 Series sedan line uses two six-cylinder engines, of 2.5- and 3.0-liter displacements. For the new model, a new, 3.0-liter engine will have 255 hp--an increase of 30 hp. BMW has not made an announcement about the specifics of the new 3 Series' second, less-powerful six-cylinder, but a company official said in an interview that the power plant will be from a new engine family and may not be a 2.5-liter unit like the outgoing base engine. Both new engines will be more fuel-efficient than the outgoing power plants.

BMW will unveil the new 3 Series in March at the Geneva International Motor Show, and then at April's New York International Auto Show for the American market. U.S. versions of the car will feature six-speed manual and automatic transmissions.

With the manual transmission, the 3.0-liter 3 Series sedan (currently called the 330i) will have a zero to 60 mph acceleration time of about six

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seconds. To remind drivers that the 3 Series is an unusually sporty sedan line, the new models will feature engine-start buttons in the cockpit, like those on high-performance cars such as **DaimlerChrysler's** (nyse: [DCX](#) - news - people ) **Dodge Viper SRT-10** convertible.

Sporting characteristics, as well as sleek exterior and interior styling, have made the 3 Series BMW's most successful model by far (through the end of October, BMW had sold 89,142 3 Series models, compared to 36,846 units of its second best-selling model, the 5 Series) as well as one of the most beloved of all vehicle lines on the market. With a reputation for superior comfort, power, handling, ride and balance, the 3 Series outsells its most similar competitor, the **Mercedes-Benz C-Class**, by about 2-to-1 in the U.S..

The familiar driving dynamics will reappear in the new, rear-wheel drive 3 Series, which will have "near-perfect, 50:50 balance of weight over the front and rear wheels," BMW said in a statement. A new front suspension of aluminum will make the 3 Series more responsive and comfortable by reducing ride-deteriorating unsprung weight--the weight of the parts of a car not supported by its springs, including wheels and tires.

Like the upscale 5 Series, the new 3 Series will feature BMW's active steering, which alters the steering's sensitivity based on vehicle speed, so that--for example--the steering is very sensitive while you're parallel parking, but not as much while you're changing lanes at 60 mph.

Other new [technology](#) on the 3 Series includes two-stage adaptive brake lights, which enlarge the brake light area whenever you brake hard or the anti-lock brakes are activated. The car's optional xenon adaptive headlights are more powerful than conventional headlights, and can turn slightly whenever the front wheels turn. And yes (technophobes, avert your eyes), BMW's Byzantine, controversial iDrive control system--which handles hundreds of features for systems such as the stereo and climate control, but requires you to take your eyes off the road for a long time in order to operate it--will be included.

### Forbes Fact

BMW may be a German company (its headquarters are in Munich), but some of its most important operations are in the United States. The company has a technology office in [Silicon Valley](#), Calif., and an industrial design firm, **DesignworksUSA**, in the same state. BMW's factory in South Carolina builds all of the company's **Z4** convertibles and **X5** sport utility vehicles.

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