

E36: OUR CHOICE

BMW M3 GT



Where most M3 GTs live and, indeed, die – on the racetrack. Buy yours wisely

THE E36 M3 NEVER TRULY recovered from its initial press skating. But I adore them and have owned both a 3.0-litre coupé and 3.2-litre saloon – the former for five years and 50,000 miles.

The '90s yielded some great drivers' machines and the E36 is one of them, coming when technology bounded forward before electronic safety nets truly took hold. This is partly why the E46 weighs 1570kg while the E36 comes in at 1460kg – there's little in it at the traffic light grand prix.

If you're deciding between the 3.0-litre or 3.2-litre, don't. It's 3.0-litre every time. These engines and five-speeders are smoother and far more reliable, the 3.2-litre cars' VANOS system (variable valve timing) being a particular weak spot. My own 3.2 had two VANOS units in 80,000 miles, costing £1500 a time where my abused 3.0-litre carries on regardless.

The big E36 weakness is snappy handling (grip, grip, grip... ooh) and vague steering. Unfortunately the 3.2's revised settings are superior, but not improved enough to sway me.

Any 3.0-litre coupé is a great buy, but the pick is 1995's GT. A homologation special, it came with green paint, larger front and rear spoilers and five-spoke alloys. The engine was usefully upgraded with race-ready mods and the GT got lower, stiffer suspension.

If you crave a GT but can't find RHD, don't be afraid to sit on the left – these cars are more plentiful and lack the UK cars' jarring wood trim. Compared with the E30 Sport Evo, the rarer GT seems conspicuously under-valued.

BEN BARRY

NEED TO KNOW

E36 BMW M3 GT

Price 1995: £39,000

Engine: 2300cc; 24V straight six, 295bhp @ 7000rpm, 238lb ft @ 3900rpm

Transmission: Five-speed manual, limited-slip differential, rear-wheel drive

Performance: 0-60mph 5.4sec, 155mph

Weight: 1460kg

Made from: Steel/aluminium doors

Price now: £9-12k