

# Coupé d'état



BMW's new X6 doesn't only make a statement, it intimidates. The Bavarian manufacturer has invented a new type of vehicle, the sports activity coupé (SAC) – and it looks awesome.

Dieter Losskarn got behind the wheel and was blown away.

The BMW X6 is the perfect answer to a question nobody asked. It creates demand for something you never knew you wanted. Swiss watchmaker Romain Jerome's 'day-night' watch comes to mind. It doesn't tell the time, only whether it's day or night. This bit of fancifulness was sold out within 48 hours of its launch at the beginning of this year, as watch fanatics snapped up the R2,2-million timepiece.

Everybody knows the South African motor industry took a big knock this year, but I'm not at all worried about BMW's decision to create a niche (SAC) in a niche (SAV) of a niche market (SUV). Only 300 X6 units were allocated to South Africa – all pre-sold.

Unfortunately, because of greater demand in the United States, only 100 will make it to our shores this year.



*'The X6 handles like a sports car in heels, going fast while sitting high.'*



*The interior design matches the outside, underlining the sporty character of the X6. A leather sports steering wheel with multifunction buttons and gearshift paddles is standard*



A couple of years ago, BMW was first with its concept of a sports activity vehicle (SAV), the very successful X5. Porsche followed with the Cayenne and Range Rover with the Sport. I'm sure we will soon see other SACs too, maybe a Merc GLS or an Audi Q8 TT.

The X6 has enormous presence. Looking like a blown-up toy car, it hits a nerve as you experience something that hasn't existed before: an agile sports coupé mated with a muscular SUV. It's a bold and brave design statement.

With its powerful stance on the road, it scores big time in the attention-seeking department. Wherever you stop, people take out their cell-phones and snap away. The reactions are more than enthusiastic.

'Magnifique,' said a parking attendant from Congo. A dynamic ad agency owner was also smitten by the car: 'It's masculine and sophisticated.' A copywriter friend added, 'It's just the right size, not too big, not too small.' A real estate agent just breathed, 'This car is beautiful.'

The X6 shares a platform with the X5, but is slightly longer with a wider rear track, also lower and lighter. The ground clearance is the same with 212mm. Whereas you could take the X5 off the beaten track, the X6, despite permanent all-wheel drive, is a pure road car, with maybe the occasional dirt road thrown in.

While both cars are German, they're actually made in BMW's United States factory in Spartanburg, South Carolina.



The interior design matches the outside, underlining the sporty character of the X6. A leather sports steering wheel with multifunction buttons and gearshift paddles is standard. The centre console features knee pads for the driver and front passenger.

The front seats have versatile adjustments and the two rear single sport seats come with integrated headrests and great side support.

At 570 litres, the luggage compartment is surprisingly spacious for a car like this – there's enough room for each of the four passengers to pack their golf bags.

As expected from a BMW in this price range, the interior oozes pure luxury, from the soft leather seats to the high-quality surfaces and state-of-the-art sound system. Even traffic

**ABOVE:** Design art: BMW's interior, with the sculpted gear shifter, oozes pure luxury while the exterior conveys raw, muscular power. **OPPOSITE:** Love it or hate it: most people seem to be delighted by the X6's extreme looks.

jams turn into pleasure time in an environment like this.

Like all BMWs, it's as safe as a car can get nowadays and received excellent crash-test results worldwide. Bi-xenon dual headlights, including a daytime light function, fog lamps, two-stage brake lights and runflat tyres all come as standard. A tyre-pressure monitor indicates the current pressure and warns you when it drops.

The X6 is the first vehicle with dynamic performance control (DPC). This distributes drive power variably, not just between the front and rear axle – by xDrive – but also between the two rear wheels with the help of multiple clutches and planetary gears. The result is a superior stabilising function even under sudden load change and in overrun.





*Traction and stability are magnificent. The steering is stunningly accurate*



I could go into more detailed technical innovations BMW put into the X6, but enough theory, let's go look for some tight bends.

After rounding False Bay and leaving Gordon's Bay behind, the R44 was where the fun really began on Clarence Drive. I became more confident as the car flew around the giant coastal slalom at a phenomenal pace, with not even a tyre squeal. It's amazing that a voluptuous vehicle like this can move that fast – it actually defies

physics. The only time I remember beating the bends that fast around here was in a Lotus Elise.

Traction and stability are magnificent. The steering is stunningly accurate. The X6 handles like a sports car in heels, going fast while sitting high. It was lunch time, but I didn't feel hungry. I didn't want to get out of this car, I wanted to drive it forever.

As I drove towards Franschoek Pass, I was having crazy ideas of selling the house to live in the X6. I

decided to have something to eat before I succumbed to putting a deposit on the vehicle.

The only thing that worried me in these 'greener' times we're living in was that it felt politically incorrect to drive a massive fossil-energy boozier like this one. To minimise my guilt, in the unlikely event that I should ever own a car like this, I would make regular trips to plant nurseries to buy tree saplings to plant to counteract the carbon emissions. Promise. ■

Super-sports car in heels: the BMW X6 is pure driving pleasure for four passengers – with golf bags.



#### The low-down

##### BMW X6 xDrive 35i

Price: from R680 000  
 Engine: 3,0 l/225 kW/302 hp  
 0–100 km/h: 6,7 sec  
 Top speed: 240 km/h  
 Consumption/100 km: 15,3 litres  
 Fuel tank: 85 litres  
 Range: 556 km  
 Ground clearance: 212 mm  
 Weight: 2 145 kg  
 For more information: [www.bmw.co.za](http://www.bmw.co.za)

There is also a diesel option available: xDrive 35d (210 kW/282 hp, from R724 000); and from April 2009 a twin-turbo 4,4 l 8 cyl, the xDrive 50i (300 kW/402 hp).

For the same amount of money (R680 000 to R724 000), you could buy:  
 BMW X5 3,0 l si (268 hp) R586 000  
 BMW X5 4,8 l i (350 hp) R702 000  
 Porsche Cayenne (290 hp) R595 000  
 Porsche Cayenne S(385 hp) R750 000  
 Audi Q7 4,2 l FSI (345 hp) R681 500  
 Range Rover Sport 4,4 l V8 (295 hp) R765 000

Next month: Two affordable and surprisingly capable newcomers from Suzuki – Grand Vitara and Jimny – join South Africa's ever growing 4x4 market.

# Wheels etc.

## New Terios a tiger

For such a compact, good-looking vehicle, the new Daihatsu Terios long-wheel base does surprisingly well off-road and even on sand dunes. The overall length has increased by 315 mm and the new interior layout provides three-row seating for seven passengers – or two rows for five with more luggage space. It's available as a 4x4 or 4x2 and standard features include air conditioning, central locking, CD player, dual airbags, emergency fuel cut-off and automatic door-lock release. Web [www.daihatsu.co.za](http://www.daihatsu.co.za).



## Nimble and powerful hog

The new XR1200 Sportster is the first Harley-Davidson that was developed in Europe and is ideal for twisting alpine roads. The result is the most agile Harley ever. As with all the other hogs, styling and livery are inspired by the past. This one shares some genes with the legendary XR750 flat-track racer. Throwing the attractive, nimble and powerful 90 hp (20 more than 'normal' Sportsters) bike around bends is pure driving pleasure. The handlebars are relatively wide, resulting in an upright, slightly forward sitting position, which gives the driver a superb enduro-like control, with the advantage of sitting much lower. It's perfect for annoying big bikes in tight turns during breakfast runs, but also great for weaving through city traffic. Most importantly, the price is right. Starting from R115 000, the XR can almost be described as a bargain. Web [www.xrDNA.com](http://www.xrDNA.com).



## Toyota 4x4 Conservation Outreach

If Gerhard Groenewald of Klipbokkop Mountain fame ([www.klipbokkop.co.za](http://www.klipbokkop.co.za)) had lived in 1836, he would definitely have been one of the Voortrekkers leading the volk into unknown parts of Africa. Mighty as a leadwood tree, with a fearsome beard and huge fists, he has a big heart, especially for our fragile environment. What better man to guide a modern trek of Toyota Fortuners and Raiders filled with 30-odd scientists and rangers for three weeks through Southern Africa?

Despite some hairy off-road sections, the inaugural trip was not (all) about having fun, it had a purpose. The group visited remote parts of existing and projected peace parks and nature conservation areas in South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana to gain some first-hand knowledge. Many rangers educated at the Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC) holding responsible positions were reunited with their former instructors. This programme with a vision for the future will be run as an annual event. To find out more about the project and how you could be a part of it, visit [www.conservationoutreach.co.za](http://www.conservationoutreach.co.za) or [www.toyota.co.za](http://www.toyota.co.za).



# Stuck

We arrived late one afternoon at the Limpopo River from Beira on route to Mopani Camp in the transfrontier park on the other side. The river was full and flowing strongly. We got advice from locals on where to cross and, without applying the golden rule of walking the route first, our leader plunged in. He promptly got washed away and flooded up to the window. So instead of using the 4x4's many horse power, we had to resort to eight-ox power to cross.

*Timothy Smith, via e-mail.*

If you have photographs of a 4x4 getting stuck, e-mail them to [wheels@getaway.co.za](mailto:wheels@getaway.co.za) or post them to Getaway Wheels, PO Box 180, Howard Place, 7450 Cape Town. You could win a Nissan Securetech recovery kit worth R1 500 comprising a recovery kit bag, nine-metre kinetic energy snatch recovery strap, five-metre pull/winch extension recovery strap, two alloy recovery bow shackles, leather gloves, key ring and Offroad Tactix instruction DVD and manual. ■



