

1 Is it the right car for you?

– marriage guidance



Tall and short drivers

The BMW X5 E53 has plenty of leg and headroom for tall drivers and passengers. And so it's no surprise that tall celebrities (of six feet and above), including footballers Steven Gerrard and Rio Ferdinand, snooker ace Stephen Hendry, and former boxer and pantomime star Frank Bruno, have all owned one. But it will also accommodate shorter drivers, such as actress Patsy Kensit – a petite five feet and four inches tall. This demonstrates the user-friendliness of this prestigious vehicle.



Weight of controls

Light and easy to handle, all have power assisted steering and brakes.

Will it fit in the garage?

Length: 183.7in, 466.598cm or 4666mm (six inches shorter than a BMW 5-series)

Width: 73.7in, 187.198cm or 1871.98mm (wider than a BMW 7-series)

Height: 67.2in, 170.688cm or 1706.88mm although some models vary, as explained later.



Emissions summary

Parkers, the car expert, sounds a note of caution: "The X5 performs badly on the eco front. With an average of 287g/km CO2 across the line-up, its emissions are high for a large 4x4. However, it's worth noting that the line-up has a high number of diesel models, bringing the average down and giving buyers more choices of low-emission versions. Diesels typically produce less CO2 than petrol engines with similar power outputs. The range is quite thirsty, averaging 25mpg."

It adds: "All models have electronic self-levelling suspension, alloy wheels, park distance control, cruise control, remote central locking, electric heated door mirrors. Sport models add 19-in alloy wheels, uprated suspension, while the 4.6iS has 20-inch alloys, flared wheelarches, twin exhaust pipes and rear head and side airbags. Options include adaptive headlights that swivel on corners."



Luxurious surroundings with plenty of room make the X5 ideal for tall drivers and passengers.

3 Living with a BMW X5

– will you get along together?



Good points

- One of the top status symbols on the road at an affordable price
- Commanding view of the road
- Sophisticated and refined
- Excellent ride and handling
- Spacious with comfortable seats
- Attractive and well designed; it's still fresh
- Strong performance
- Generally good build quality
- Robust engines

Bad points

- Thirsty
- Environmentally unfriendly
- Expensive servicing and parts
- High insurance and road tax
- Interior trim and switches are prone to breakage

Summary

This well-styled king of the road is capable, versatile, and a great drive. A used example in good condition represents a good long-term investment. Buy the best possible to guard against unnecessary expense.



Great looks and practicality – a capable all-round vehicle.

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7 Fifteen minute evaluation

– walk away or stay?



Road test

My road test was conducted using a 2002-registered three-litre diesel, purchased by Wally Pickett from Shedfield in Hampshire in 2007. The 12,000-mile vehicle – complete with private number plate, X55 URF (X5 SURF) – cost £19,000. Wally sold his Mercedes ML 300 for £5000, which he put towards his new purchase.

The first thing to do when evaluating an X5 is to sit in the driver's seat and check that all the controls work, including the electric windows and wing mirrors; broken or defective motors can be expensive to rectify. Turn on the ignition and the diesel engine will make a typical rattle. This will be audible from the outside but, thanks to good quality soundproofing, cannot be heard from inside. If, however, the engine rattles more than expected on start-up, and/or it is audible inside the car, this could indicate timing issues. At this point it's advisable to look in the rear view mirror (or check at the rear of the car) for blue smoke, the sign of an abused engine. New engines aren't cheap, and it's far better to pay a bit more for a well-looked-after vehicle than to buy a cheaper, poor quality example.

The doors should shut with a satisfying clunk.

Although often criticised for the amount of black in the interior (on the dash, the doors and the seats), the interior

The driver's seat is the first area to suffer wear and tear.



A road test over a variety of surfaces is a must when considering an X5.



A clean engine is always a good sign.



Check overall condition of the interior.

is hardwearing, and the black leather seats are comfortable and supportive, ensuring that all passengers reach their destination in a relaxed state, even after long journeys.

9 Serious evaluation

– 60 minutes for years of enjoyment



Score each section according to the values in the boxes: 4 = excellent; 3 = good; 2 = average; 1 = poor. The totting up procedure is detailed at the end of the chapter. Be realistic in your marking!

You've got this far, so now it's time to go for the step-by-step detailed inspection, before deciding whether to part with your hard-earned cash. Read, digest, check against your intended purchase, and then tick the appropriate box (excellent, good, average, poor) and total the points. Be especially vigilant with regard to the key points highlighted in chapter 8.

Former BBC *Top Gear* presenter Quentin Willson once waxed lyrical about buying vehicles that are over 10 years old because anything that is going to go wrong already has, and all major repairs have been carried out. The X5 E53 fits perfectly into this category, having been first introduced in 1999. The expert's advice, therefore, would be to go for a well-maintained early example.

Engine

- 3.0i M54 engine, 6-cylinder, 3.0-litre
- 4.4i M62 TU engine, V8, 4.4 litre
- 4.4i N62 engine, V8, 4.4-litre (Valvetronic)
- 4.6is M62 TU engine, V8, 4.6-litre
- 4.8is N62 engine, V8, 4.8-litre (Valvetronic)

Engine management systems (Motronic)

- Siemens DME MS 43
- Bosch DME ME 7.2
- Bosch DME 9.2.1

Transmissions

- Manual 5-speed S5D280Z
- Manual 6-speed GS637BZ
- Automatic 5-speed A5S390R
- Automatic 5-speed A5S440Z
- Automatic 6-speed GA6HP26Z



The sign of a well-maintained vehicle is a clean engine bay.

Generally speaking, all of the BMW X5 E53 engines listed above are well engineered, and easily capable of covering at least 300,000 miles (if regularly serviced and maintained). As with many modern vehicles, the engine is a sealed unit that only an expert mechanic can access. Is there a rubber cover over part of the engine? These can blow off in high winds as they are retained by only four plastic pins inserted into rubber grommets. Affordable replacements can be purchased from various outlets, including eBay.

It's only when you're behind the wheel that problems will truly become apparent. The X5 E53 should accelerate swiftly between gears, but if it drags its



Front suspension can be susceptible to oil leaks.



A replacement front lower radius arm to chassis bushing set for the BMW X5 E53.



Rear suspension can be susceptible to oil leaks.

on each of the four corners of the vehicle in turn. So long as they instantly spring back up you have nothing to worry about, but squeaks, rattles, or a delay in regaining the correct stance should set off warning bells. Just to remedy worn front suspension will cost several hundred ⚡, so be thorough in your checks. Pay particular attention to the track rod ends. Is there any play on the suspension joints? It's not unusual for the CV (constant velocity) joint boot to need replacing – this allows a driveshaft to transmit power through a variable angle. They are mainly used in all-wheel drive vehicles such as the X5 E53.

Check the power steering pipe and rack for leaks. A road test will help highlight questionable suspension. A 'knocking' sound when on the move is a sure sign of broken coils or springs.

Brakes

4 **3** **2** **1**

The BMW X5 E53 weighs almost two tonnes, so its all-round discs and pads are absolutely vital. Therefore, it is extremely important to ensure that they are not excessively worn. Reaching through the alloy wheel will reveal that they have at least been securely fitted but it's harder to check the actual wear and tear. Any unexpected noises during the test drive should be investigated immediately (a screeching noise may