

redline that you find yourself running up and down through the gears just to hear it one more time.

All this power is harnessed to a 7-speed sequential M gearbox (SMG) operated either by steering-wheel paddles, a center console lever or you can just leave the system in full automatic. This third-generation SMG is far superior to any before, providing jerk-free (computer-controlled) clutch slips as you pull away from a stop. This is the only transmission available for the M5, though a true manual (that's right, with three pedals!) is said to be in the works for the M6. Incredibly quick (though abrupt) full-throttle shifts in the Drivelogic's sportiest setting (of 11 to choose from) mean both the M5 and M6 chirp the rear tires going into 3rd gear.

While this system (like Ferrari's F1 gearbox) is completely state-of-the-art, you do lose the driving pleasure associated with old-school techniques such as heel-and-toe downshifting. Personally, I'd also prefer the paddles to be steering-column mounted instead of wheel-mounted; as

**»»The sleek, sexy M6 coupe is one of the most competent GTs in the world. The cockpit is German-serious, though sportier than the M5's. Rear seats are livable, but just barely; 19-in. forged alloy wheels house huge brakes, while the exhaust hints at the enormous power and race-car sounds that emanate from the 500-bhp 5.0-liter V-10.**

someone who shuffle-steers, it can get confusing as to where the proper paddle is.

Surprisingly, neither car feels as fast as their identical 4.1-second 0-60-mph times indicate, at least in real-world driving. Which is strange, because 4.1 is fast. Really fast. Faster than a Ferrari 612 Scaglietti, every Aston Martin and the Bentley Continental GT. Equally impressive are quarter-mile times of 12.4 sec. (the few cars barely quicker include supercars such as the Ferrari F430, Lamborghini Gallardo and Murciélago and the Ford GT), the lighter—by 265 lb.—M6 showing a higher trap speed of 118.1 mph versus the M5's 115.8. Of note, we used BMW's Formula 1-like launch control mode (which won't be available in the U.S.) to achieve our best times; after you initiate the system, all that's required is to keep your foot to the floor—the computer manages wheelspin. But it's only good for a couple of launches before the clutch heats up and the system automatically shuts down.

So why don't these M cars overwhelm us with their power ('cause you're thinking, 500 bhp is a lot of horses, right?) the way, say, a Dodge Viper does? We attribute it to the soft bottom end of the powerband combined with the lack of a real high-rpm rush. In the Ms, the rush comes on after 3000 rpm and then stays consistently thrusty all the way to redline, the finely tuned BMW engines thereby making the cars deceptively fast. The close-ratio 7-speed doesn't

