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KELLENNERS SPORT KS1-S

BLACK
AND
WHITE

Black and white, yin and yang; the universe is full of contrasts, but cars that strike a good balance between performance, ride, handling and economy are to be coveted, and, as Dr. Ian Kuah finds out, BMW's 1-Series M is on that short list.

When I first drove a pre-production example of the 1-Series M last year, I was hugely impressed with the all-round performance of this pocket rocket. I also loved the squat and purposeful stance conferred by its lowered ride height, flared wheel arches and big wheels.

However, two things drew a lukewarm reaction from the hard-core enthusiast in me. The first was a noticeably less crisp throttle response than the normally-aspirated V8 that powers its M3 bigger brother. The second was the absence of a spine tingling soundtrack.

I have just driven the Kelleners Sport take on the 1-Series M, and am happy to report that this small, but long established German BMW tuner has transformed the smallest M car in ways that I never thought possible.

Not only have they fully addressed my two criticisms of the character of the stock car with their KS1-S conversion, but they have also managed to add enough extra panache that I just wanted to keep on driving it until the fuel tank was empty. I can tell you that this does not happen very often.

The lynchpin of the Kelleners Sport SW 35M motor upgrade is a re-mapped ECU that turns up the wick on the extrovert side of the straight-six M-motor all the way to 11.

Frankly I was amazed at the change this conversion has wrought to the motor's character despite the relatively conservative on-paper extra power output.





Despite the turbocharger pipework and the lack of a single throttle-per-cylinder, blipping the loud pedal at idle now brings a crisp and instant reply from up front, sending the revs soaring and falling just like on a well-tuned naturally aspirated motor.

Floor the throttle and the car surges forward on a wave of torque as the rev counter needle whizzes around the dial. In scant seconds, you are grabbing for the next ratio on the manual six-speeder as the motor screams round towards the 7,000rpm redline like a thing possessed.

Behind your head, the stainless steel sports exhaust with its four polished 83mm diameter outlet pipes underpins this newfound snappiness with a more sonorous exhaust note. The new back box may only be worth a couple of extra horses on the dyno, but its reduced back-pressure makes a palpable contribution to the way the engine sings.

The twin-turbo straight-six motor now feels that it is breathing through bigger lungs, and that in itself makes a positive difference to the way it attacks the upper part of its working range.

The 1-Series M leaves the factory with 340bhp at 5,900rpm and 450Nm of torque from 1,500 to 4,500rpm. When I drove it, the prototype Kelleners Sport conversion had ramped this up to 410bhp and 550Nm, an increase of 70bhp and 100Nm of torque. This takes the power-to-weight ratio of the 1,570kg 1-Series M from 4.4 to 3.8 kg/bhp.

In percentage terms, this is a 20 percent increase in power and 22.2 percent increase in torque, a modest increase that is well within the capability of the stock drivetrain to handle.

On a twisty section of country road, I found that the old skills of heeling and toeing and trail braking into bends came to the fore. Rocketing out of bends with the straight six extended in the middle ratios of the manual 'box brought back memories of the first two generations of M3, smaller and lighter cars than today's V8-powered monster.

The irony is that in stock form, even the lighter 1-Series M out muscled the more powerful but heavier and less torque rich M3 in the low and mid-ranges. With 100Nm more twist at its crankshaft than the stock 1-Series M, the Kelleners KS1-S will leave an M3 for dead in a straight line.

The only downside to the Kelleners Sport conversion is the 20-inch alloys. Sized 9.0J front and 10J x 20-inch rear, with 245/30ZR20 and 265/30ZR20 tyres, these wheels look terrific at first glance. But after a few seconds of gaping at their elegant design, you realise that the 1-Series M is not a big 5 or 7-Series, and the 20s make it look rather like a cartoon caricature of itself.

The rubber band tyres wrapped around these wheels also do the ride no favours, making the low speed secondary ride decidedly bouncy. They act like an extra spring that the car definitely does not need, unsettling the chassis over

undulations taken at higher speeds. I would not want to try driving quickly down a bumpy road in the wet with this wheels and tyre combination.

Thankfully Kelleners offer 19-inch versions of their two wheel designs, which use the stock rubber, and I suggested that they let me try this combination. So while we were at lunch, the mechanics swapped the 20s for 9.0J and 10.0J x 19-inch wheels shod with 245/35ZR19 and 265/35ZR19 Michelins.

It only took a short drive to ascertain that the 19s sort the visual and ride/handling issues in one go without giving up much in outright grip. On 19s, the KS1-S feels just about right as a fast road machine for everyday use, and its balance is such that you would seldom be in a position where you would really want more power or grip.

As the Kelleners Sport 19s are the same size as the factory wheels, they highlighted the fact that the coil-over suspension kit strikes a perfect balance with the extra power.

This is not a surprise really as the suspension kit was developed in conjunction with Ralf Kelleners, who sold the company to its present owner last year, but who still does some development work for Kelleners Sport. Incidentally, Ralf is a professional race driver, who was part of Porsche's works Le Mans GT1 team in 1997 and the GT1 class winner at the inaugural Petit Le Mans race in 1998.



Featuring independently adjustable bounce and rebound control as well as ride height adjustment, the Kelleners Sport suspension has a firm but compliant ride, and has been set up to perfectly match the increased output of the motor.

The stock rubber may not have the sheer mechanical grip of the 20s on a flat, dry strip of tarmac, but they are more than adequate for road use. They also feel more pleasant to the fingertips by dint of delivering more feel and feedback, and are more progressive on the limit.

The electronically controlled M Differential works perfectly with the extra power, and the powerful factory brakes are fine for road use although track day junkies will probably need harder pads or a complete brake upgrade.

One advantage of re-using the stock tyres is that it frees up money that can be usefully spent elsewhere. That elsewhere might well be for the MS front spoiler lip that reduces lift over the front axle or three-piece MS polished electro-plated stainless steel grille set that give the car its more distinctive face.

It might also be in the cabin where the Kelleners Sport trim shop has done a great job of sprucing up the well-finished but rather austere stock interior. Their bespoke black and white leather and Alcantara retrim looks really classy, and has nice details like the subtle anthracite Alcantara inserts between the black and white leather in the seats, white contrasting stitching on the black leather and Alcantara instrument binnacle hood, and the Kelleners Sport logos embroidered on the headrests.

The expected alloy pedal set and floor mats are part of the package, and extra touches are the Alcantara trim on the door inserts and upper and lower sections of the steering wheel, Alcantara gear lever and handbrake boots. A final flourish is the unusual white lacquered dashboard and door pull trims where you normally expect to find carbon-fibre or black piano lacquer.

So what's next? Just before we went to press, Kelleners Sport told me that they had decided to offer Stage One and Two conversions, known as KS Power 35M and KS Power 35M RS respectively.

With 400bhp and 540Nm of torque, the 35M upgrade is slightly less frisky than the car I drove. However, the RS version uses a larger, more efficient intercooler, 200 cell metal catalysts and larger turbo downpipes along with a remap that makes the most of these tweaks. Output goes up to 420bhp with a significant boost in torque to 590Nm. The new intercooler is the key to this, as it allows a slightly higher boost pressure to be safely used through lowering of the charge air temperature.

As tested with the power and torque somewhere in between these two states of tune, any misgivings I may have had over the credentials of the 1-Series M as a fully-fledged member of the M car club were blown away. The Kelleners Sport KS1-S injects just the right amount of visceral character into the mix.

In fact I was having so much fun that it did not even occur to me how many milliseconds a DCT paddle shift gearbox might carve off each upshift should BMW ever decide to offer one. In the end, some things are best measured in smiles per mile!



BLACK LIST

Modifications

Engine: M-tuned N54, 2,979cc In-line six, twin-turbocharged
Exhaust: Kelleners Stainless Steel Sports Exhaust System
Electronics: Kelleners SW 35M ECU Tuning

Handling

Suspension: Adjustable Coilover Suspension System
Wheels: Kelleners Hamburg 20x9.0J (F) / 20x10.0J (R)
Tyres: 245/30R20 (F) / 265/30R20 (R)

Exterior

Body Kit: Front Chin Spoiler, Front 3-piece Mesh Grille Insert

Interior

Trim: Customised Black/White Leather/Alcantara Trim
Others: Customised Kelleners Emblems

Make: BMW-Kelleners
Model/Year: 1-Series M (KS1-S)
Transmission: 6-MT
Drive Layout: RWD
Max Power/Output: 410bhp/550Nm