BMW i3 electric vehicle test drive review

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BMW's entry into the electric vehicle (EV) market has come with a bang, a sleek stylish design typical of that by BMW, as good to sit in as a 3 series. With a range of up to 100 miles for the pure plug-in electric version and 180+ miles for the range extender version, the i3 is a unique electric car and more than just a city run around. BMW have told electriccar2buy that there is already huge interest around this EV, and demand is growing daily. We went to one of their showrooms to have a look for ourselves.

The exterior of the BMW i3 showcases an excitable design with some of BMW's more traditional features, it is clear to see who has manufactured this car. With U-shaped LED daytime running lights and blue inserts around the grill the image of the vehicle has a distinctive and impressive look. When we first glanced at this vehicle we noticed the clear quality and build typical of BMW, with sleek corners, curves and edges coupled with the futuristic look of the BMW i range, this is clearly a vehicle that bridges the gap between the conventional car and the new concept electric vehicles. The body and passenger compartment of the car are made from carbon fiber reinforced plastic, the vehicle is surprisingly light with a 30% weight reduction by not using aluminium, but also strong providing optimal safety.

The interior; the i3 demonstrates a fresh design approach, the first thing you notice is the way the doors open, with the rear passenger doors opening backwards, along with no conventional B-pillars the whole side of the car seems to open up giving you a huge amount of space and room to manoeuvre in and out of the vehicle. With a loft interior designed to emphasis the spacious interior of the vehicle and increase the levels of light in the car, the only criticism is the leg room in the rear, is a little constraint. The interior is modern and futuristic with the digital displays, flat screen monitor and touch button controls, however, this is done subtly and you still instinctively know what and where all the traditional controls are. BMW offer the ConnectorDrive service which allows you to get connected to the world inside your vehicle whether that's keeping up-to-date on Facebook and Twitter or finding the best route to get to your destination, this will be done via the connection.

A typical BMW 50% weight ratio is achieved by distributing the battery cells at the bottom of the vehicle between the front and rear wheels and axles, this gives the vehicle an extremely low centre of gravity, bearing in mind that the body of the vehicle is extremely light weight. The electric motor and drive sits over the rear wheels, all the drive module is situated between the front wheels. When you pop the bonnet of the i3 you expect to see all sorts of things, however, you cannot see any of the workings of the vehicle and it takes you by surprise, in fact when and if you get on your knees and look under the vehicle, bonnet or anywhere, you can't actually see any of the internal workings of the car. One of the main reasons for this is that there is far less involved in running electric cars and a lot less moving part, this is one of the reasons why long term reliability should be improved with electric cars.

Charging is one of the most important aspects and to alleviate anxiety potential that most EV buyers are worried about, using the cable provided you can charge the high-voltage lithium batteries in any conventional socket, standard charges take less than 7 hours however, for a regular fast charge BMW recommends the i wall box. The BMW i wall box will be fitted by the BMW team prior to delivery of your vehicle and they will come to your house and assess and decide with you the whereabouts of its location. With the i wall charger fast charging, up to 80% of battery can be achieved in less than 3 hours. As an extra on the vehicle you can get what is called the DC rapid charge function which is the perfect solution to charge your vehicle in a time less than 30 minutes. As with any modern technology there is an app for your phone, which features the innovative function that allows you to warm up your vehicle in the winter and cool it in the summer. Other features include being able to check the current status of the vehicles charge. BMW offer a service called ChargeNow which is in partnership with Charge Master plc, it gives access to customers to the largest electric car charging network. The i3 comes with an 8 year, 100,000 mile high-voltage battery warranty as standard, to accompany the 3 year unlimited mileage vehicle warranty.

The road test; we took the i3 out on the road for a drive, the first thing you notice is how comfortable the vehicle is in every aspect, it is very simple to operate for someone who's never driven an electric car before. Other notable features include the acceleration produced by the electric motor, producing 250Nm of torque from a standing start the BMW i3 pulls away effortlessly leaving many powerful vehicle standing, over the first few meters. You soon have to alter your driving technique to be slightly more sensitive on the accelerator pedal, also when you let off the accelerator pedal it applies the dynamos which in fact recharge the electric motor therefore conserving the energy of the vehicle. This in turn causes engine braking, so when you release the accelerator you feel the car braking and decelerating fairly quickly. Again, this means you will find you change your driving technique and you actually break a

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lot less than normal. All this is helped along by the BMW's unique edrive system giving the powerful torque and an impressive acceleration from a standing start. With it's low centre of gravity the i3 handles extremely well, however, you do sit fairly high up inside the vehicle with an elevated seating position similar to that of an SUV, because you are sitting on top of the lithium battery pack. This in turn means that the car does have a fair amount of body roll when cornering, one of the advantages of the short wheel base of the i3 is the truing circle, similar if not better than that of a London Taxi.

The stats; The i3 features 170 hp, 0 to 62 mph in 7.2 seconds, CO2 emissions zero, average energy consumption is 12.9 kWh per 62 miles. Real-world electric range is up to 100 miles, with the range extender model up 187 miles. Basic on the road pricing is around £31,000, the VED band A is free to tax and the insurance group is 21. Other benefits are that the i3 is congestion charge exempt and bus lanes throughout London can be used for electric vehicles. Government Grants are available for up to £5000 towards the purchase price of the vehicle.

The sustainability of the BMW i range extends beyond the actual vehicles itself, it actually goes to the manufacturing of the vehicle with 100% of lithium high-voltage batteries will be recycled, 50% less energy is required in production, 70% less water used in production, 100% renewable energy is used within the production process, 95% recyclable materials are used within the vehicle and 50% less CO2 when driving in electric mode with energy from renewable sources.

We were extremely impressed with the BMW i3 from start to finish and with the demand for the vehicle growing, and with more electric cars for sale we expect to see a lot more of these on the roads very soon.

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