



# PROPELLER LOVE

BMW car clubs rev up passion  
in and out of driver's seat

On a packed downtown street in Montreal, the night of Saturday, June 14 2003, a special tingle was in the air. BMW Williams drivers Ralf Schumacher and Juan Pablo Montoya had qualified 1-2 for perhaps the final Formula 1 race in Canada, and a sea of humanity had gathered around for BMW's annual F1 street party. Between the visual barrage of F1 posters, hats, umbrellas, the stage for the upcoming fashion show and the sheer mass of bumping torsos and extruding limbs, one could barely tell from more than a few metres away what was attracting so much attention.

It was a lineup of BMW M models, shining gloriously in the quickly darkening twilight. Some of them were brand new 2003 M3 coupes, but there were also lovely older M3 models on hand (two E36s and an E30), as well as a couple "currently enjoyed" M5 super sedans (E28 and E34 models), and a mean-looking modern M5. Interestingly, the progression of earlier M muscle received just as much admiration and nose prints as their newer counterparts. For those BMW M fans lucky enough to see the assembled group, the sight will no doubt remain skid-marked into their minds.

It was in the sheet-metal proof that BMW understood the passion behind true performance vehicles, even before they become involved in the glitzy world of Formula 1 competition.

What brought that extraordinary lineup of vehicles together for all to admire was "M-Night," a collaborative effort by BMW Group Canada (which provided the new SMG-equipped M3s) and the BMW Club of Canada, whose members provided the rest. The latter is an umbrella organization that includes eight regional chapters across the country. The group has been helping create memorable motoring moments for BMW enthusiasts for the past 30 years, and their efforts are becoming recognized more and more by consumers and BMW head office types.

Comprising nearly 1,400 BMW enthusiasts around the country, there are BMWCC chapters in Ontario (Ottawa and Toronto), Quebec (Montreal), Vancouver and Vancouver Island, northern and southern Alberta, and in Halifax with the Bluenose chapter. BMW Group Canada helps each of these groups financially by supporting BMWCC, which in turn gets distributed to each club in order to help with each organization's costs (web-hosting of each club's website, newsletter and/or mailing costs, event expenses, keeping membership costs down, etc.).

President of the BMWCC and Montreal resident Phil Abrami says that one of the main benefits to club ownership is having access to expertise on how to drive and maintain their vehicles (in both performance and looks). "But we definitely don't just sit around and talk about our cars, we drive them as well."

Each group has its own schedule of events based on the interests of its members, but there are a few activities that are popular in each chapter.

## BMW CAR CLUBS ACROSS CANADA

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The first, not surprisingly, is club racing, where members take their vehicles out to a local parking lot or race track, and really push their vehicles (and themselves) to probe the limits of both. Autocrossing, or cone racing, is more common than track days because of the lower expense and closer proximity of large parking lots to downtown areas, even though the advent of Sunday shopping has limited the number of available lots in some city centres.

Autocross (also called autoslalom or Solo II) events place an emphasis on handling and car control, since the tight cone maze set up by club volunteers must be sliced and diced through as quickly and cleanly as possible. Even a brush of a cone usually brings a serious time penalty (two seconds or more), while driving out of control and missing a gate or braking "box" at the end can nullify a good run. It's a parking lot Grand Prix which forces its participants to practice forward vision (looking ahead to the next corner or two) and smoothness, both of which can help make much better – and safer – real world drivers.

**Track days are more about experiencing the full repertoire of automotive athleticism.** It's about putting every single horsepower to good use, and places just as much demand on good brakes, and balanced handling. At these elevated speeds, track days are the best way to go for BMW owners looking for the adrenaline rush of dancing on the edge of grip.

To learn and then practice the nuances of this type of performance driving, each chapter offers driving schools or clinics. These usually take place over a day or two at a race track, and involve three basic components: classroom instruction, parking lot or skidpad practice, then actual track time. BMWCC supports these schools and the club racing events by providing the group insurance for all eight chapters around the country.

Sharing the secrets of driving quickly but safely is not only a thrill for the students, says Rob Foreman, president of the Toronto-area Trillium chapter. "I love to teach people to handle their cars at high speeds on a race track," he says. "The real joy is being there when they finally 'get it,' that epiphany can be awesome and is really, really rewarding."

Other popular activities include concours, or "show and shine" events, where owners who love to care for their vehicle's appearance take centre stage. These sometimes take place in conjunction with touring or day trips, which are especially popular in the fall. Other social activities vary by chapter, but can include things such as wine tasting tours, karting nights, and technical sessions at local area dealerships.

Unlike Porsche and Ferrari clubs, club members don't have to own a BMW, although most do. "You just have to be a fan of the cars," says Abrami, the proud owner of a 1988 M3. "So we actually convert some non-owners into buyers."

This type of influence is recognized at very high levels of the BMW hierarchy in Canada, North America and at parent company BMW AG in Germany. BMW club members play an important role as passionate ambassadors to the marque. For that reason, BMW AG created The International Council of BMW Clubs many years ago, which gathers every year to ensure an open communications link between the top decision makers in Germany and their international affiliates, and more than 200,000 BMW car club members around the world.

"At the club level BMW owners are typically enthusiasts more so than owners of any other brand," says Ralf Drommer, membership director of the BMW Club of BC (mainland) and national secretary for the BMWCC. "This is truly unique in the car club world, and the clubs and the BMW group (BMW Group Canada and BMW AG, and the International Council) strive to continue this type of enthusiasm." Plans are in the works for a digitized driver training manual and a high performance how-to video, to be made available to all chapters.

With this type of cooperation still going strong, more fond BMW memories are sure to follow in Canada – with or without the Formula 1 race.



THESE EIGHT REGIONAL CHAPTERS MAKE UP  
THE NATIONAL BMW CLUB OF CANADA.

