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A Nimble Backroad Whale

Marketed as a part-time track star, this big car is more at home on lonely two-lane roads

by Alex Martin-Banzer

Courtesy of BMW



The 2014 BMW M6 Gran Coupe — imposing from the front ...



... and the back

Flying all the way from Oregon to Texas to drive a car sounds a little bit crazy, but we're talking about BMW's 2014 M6 Gran Coupe — on the Circuit of the Americas track near Austin.

Once I reached the track, the BMW instructor waved his arm at the array of 2014 M6 Gran Coupes lined up in the pits and uttered my favorite sentence: "Take your pick."

And there she was, with her carbon-fiber roof, my M6, whispering promises of a 4.4-liter V8 turbo. I could hear the tires singing already.

The engine, with 560 true Bavarian horsepower, transformed me from an average track driver into a good one. Every time I tried to downshift too early or take a corner with too much throttle, the twin-turbo machine patted me on my head, told me it was okay — and then corrected my mistakes. All I had to do was give the 4,430-pound machine throttle and it motored on.

There was a sublime moment as I came through the swooping arch of Turn 17, when my tires let out the siren song of the Ultimate Driving Machine. This brought me back to the debriefing the night before, where Albert Biermann, the design mastermind of BMW's M cars, said, "Who wants all-wheel drive? We could go the easy way like others, but where is the fun in that? We sell this type of emotion in our cars."

Yes, I love track days in high-performance cars, but I love backroad driving even more. It was time to take the car on a scenic drive. As the first curve came about, I double-clutched my way into third gear and activated sports mode. The \$113,000 car

hunkered down on all four tires and dared me. And I dared it.

This is a big, powerful BMW, but the road showed me how light and nimble this car actually feels. It actually felt more at home working hard on the road than on the track, where I was constantly reminded how big the Gran Coupe was. By the time I was finished with my backroad drive, the M6 had officially stolen my heart.

BMW wants to market this car to a group of people who will do track days in the morning — and then take the car to meet up with friends for a round of golf. I disagree. This car should be marketed to people who wake up early, grab a coffee, and careen away on a drive through a national forest — where the car can blend in with the rest of the natural predators. Yes — this car is everything BMW wanted it to be. However, taking it on the track consistently is not something that I see in its future.

The 2014 BMW M6 Gran Coupe — on the track, it's a fast and graceful whale. On sweeping back roads, it's the reason I love driving in the first place. ♦



The M6 is formidably big and powerful, but it reveals its nimble abilities on backroad cruises