

BMW M3 CSL: PH Carpool

Monday, November 24, 2014 in [PH Carpool](#)

Now on his 14th (!) M3 this week's Carpooler may finally have found a keeper



Name: John Denny

Car: 2003 BMW M3 CSL

Owned since: September 2014

Previously owned: "13 BMW M3s. 10x E36s, 2x E46s and an E92. Alpina B3, BMW 535i Sport, 3x Toyota MR2s, Celica GT4, 5x Opel Mantas, Porsche Boxster, 2x 911, Audi S3, Audi S4, 2x Ford Escort Mk1 and Ford Escort Mk2."

Why I bought it:

"Because I had to! I have been a BMW M3 lover since I first saw one in 1993 and it has always represented the pinnacle of rear-wheel drive to me. The M3 is such a sorted car, the E36 seemed just like a modern Manta in the 90s which was my car at the time; obviously when the E46 CSL came out it seemed the best of the best! I sat in one at a dealers when they were new but didn't drive a CSL until 2010 while on a photoshoot with my last E36 M3 as part of BMW Car's M3 25th Anniversary special. It was made even more special as that CSL was BMW's heritage car that featured on Top Gear.

"Now I've heard many people say that you shouldn't drive your dream car. Stuff like the General Lee Dodge Charger or a Lamborghini Countach come to mind as cars that made better posters than driving experiences. But that wasn't an issue with the CSL, in fact it was everything I thought it would be and more. That initial bark of the engine as it starts made for the biggest smile I've ever had on my face.



A dream realised for John and it doesn't disappoint

"So roll forward to 2013 and with a few car deals done, plus having my E92 stolen and then written off, I was fortunate enough to have sufficient funds for a CSL. A car came up for sale in Somerset, but that one didn't work out. Then a CSL Register member said his was for sale and he was literally just up the road! This was totally unprecedented for my usual car buying trips, which usually involve five hours, four trains and a taxi!"

What I wish I'd known:

"I have had many BMWs and spent lots of time and money putting them back to standard, resetting alloys, replacing worn trim and the like. This particular car had been slightly 'pimped', having had the grilles, vents and wheels sprayed matt black. Like many CSLs too it had been fitted with a set of wheel spacers to give it a more aggressive stance and the rear diffuser was a full carbon affair rather than the BMW OEM. Oh, and there had been some carbon wrap applied to the interior dash inserts.

"And so began the journey back to standard! The new grilles, side vents and interior inserts were just over £500 plus VAT. The alloys had to be dipped and re enamelled, then reshod with a second hand set of Michelin Pilot Sports I was lucky enough to get from a member of the CSL Register again. The car came with budget tyres that didn't quite work!

"Now this was a bit of a faff as I had to borrow some wheels from a friend, change my wheels over, get my wheels to the painter, then to the tyre people and back on the car. I seemed to have the car on and off the jack on a weekly basis but the net result was getting my black wheels silver again for under £1,000 with nice tyres.

"The biggest issue is the diffuser as the original ones are over £1,000 before painting. Therefore any future CSL purchase would be as close to standard in the first instance to avoid this hassle. It's always a balance though; I wanted a car to drive and so a prestige low mileage example would have been a waste.

"Of course lots of CSLs are tracked and so the AP Racing brake upgrade is popular. Those kits are not cheap and can even affect the asking price. Some also have suspension upgrades, to

coilovers usually, or have just been put back to standard for the sale. All this is fine as long as the geometry has been checked. Mine had previously been running coilovers, but was put back to standard and wheel aligned after so it was perfect!"



Returned to standard and very nice too

Things I love:

"The CSL feels special just walking up to it. The fixed bucket seats grab you and the Alcantara steering wheel reminds you that you're in something special. Then you start up and drive off and it feels full of life, ready to go. But when it's cold and you try to move it along more than it wants to, it coughs and snorts like a bull just wanting to smash through a gate.

"As the CSL is so much lighter than the standard E46 M3 it feels more nimble and more agile. When warm and with sports mode engaged the sound as you pass 4,000 rpm and the airbox flap opens is phenomenal. It's enough to scare passers-by and leaves you thinking about where the nearest tunnel is!

"The styling is great too. It just works for me, from the tip of the extended carbon splitters to the top of the boot lid lip, its aggressive yet understated. Even more so on mine as it's Sapphire Black.

"Having a car that's just a bit different is nice too as the car people recognise it. The general public largely ignore it, but you also see those that have clocked something special and are peering at the CSL badge."



This is a large part of the appeal...

Things I hate:

"Not many things I hate on the car, the only niggles are that in and around traffic the CSL and M3 SMGs in general don't like stop start driving. At low speed and low revs they seem

cumbersome and so there aren't many smooth changes around town. As well as this, hill starts are a very delicate balance of brake and throttle.

"The steering wheel seems to attract moisture when sitting in the colder months, so I have to keep the cabin aired. I suppose the main issue though is the fixed seats as sometimes you feel the sides are grabbing you rather than holding you but, again, a quick prod of throttle and most of these issues are forgotten."

Costs:

"The CSL isn't too expensive to run. I use it three or four times a week and at the weekends, mixing in our old Audi estate for moving the dog around. I'm lucky as my commute is a round trip of just over 30 miles. I get just under 30mpg, and being over 40 the insurance is under £400 at the moment with 18 years NCB.

"I get most of my work done at R G Lewis Tattenhall, though it was serviced by MB Tech Warrington before I bought it. It's due another service soon and needs a set of tyres; the rears are over £275 each and the fronts more than £250, so that's going to hurt. Tax is £156.75 for six months which is not great but considerably cheaper than my old E92. Parts for BMWs can be dear, but I get a good deal from Harry Fairbairn through one of the BMW forums and they deliver to the house!

"The only thing to look out for on the CSL in my opinion is the SMG, as if this plays up it can be expensive. I've had major issues with two of three previous SMGs but it still suits the way I drive, so it's worth the risk."



SMG not a drawback for me.

Where I've been:

"Most recently I have been to North Wales including the Evo Triangle and two weeks ago I finally plucked up the courage to take the car for a session around Oulton Park. It was very interesting, especially as it was lashing down with rain! Not great for 360hp rear-wheel drive cars but challenging..."

What next?

"My wife says that the reason I have had so many cars is because I was always hoping to get a CSL. Now I have one I can't have another car for a long time..."

"However, if I could change the two options are either selling my CSL and buying a lower mileage grey car for a change, or winning the lottery and buying a Nissan GT-R for my daily

commute. For now I'll stick with the trusty CSL, and while I have her I'll shower some more treats on her. These will include getting the sponge replaced in the driver's seat to make the daily drive a bit more comfortable and one day I may even go nuts and upgrade that rear diffuser. But as I have already said, at £1,000 plus I think it can stay as it is for a while yet."