



ROAD Z TER

WHAT WE SEE OF THE
LATEST VERSION OF THE
Z4 ROADSTER LOOKS LIKE
A WINNER.

ROUNDEL JULY 2018

BMW has been teasing us with the new Z4 roadster ever since the BMW Concept Z4 Roadster was unveiled on the reviewing stand of the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance last August. Now we've had a chance to see the final version of the car and drive nearly-final prototypes at and around BMW's southern testing facility in Miramas, France. We won't see

the Z4 without its pajamas until late August—at Pebble Beach again, perhaps?—but we can share many technical details and get an impression of how it drives.

First, BMW Z4 fans probably need to thank Toyota for the new Z4. The roadster market around the world has shrunk; it's now a segment so small that it may no longer be viable on its own. However, since Toyota

contracted with BMW to develop a new sports car for them, it gave BMW the basis to build a roadster at the same time. So they developed a semi-hardtop roadster for our favorite brand and a fixed-roof sport coupe for Toyota; rumor has it that this coupe will revive the Supra name.

The design of the BMW Z4 follows the concept very closely, except for the

concept's bi-color interior and dramatic roll-hoop fairings. Suffice it to say that if you liked the Concept Z4, you'll like the production version.

The lines are rather subtle, so color really seems to matter. We were shown two cars: The first was a bright red Z4 M40i with black nineteen-inch wheels, which, to my eyes, hid all the beautiful sculpting of



STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY
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the body. The second was painted in Frozen Grey Metallic with wheels and metal trim details in a very rich-looking warm brownish silver; the total effect was gorgeous with the roof open or closed.

The front of the car retains the vertically stacked headlights from the concept, and the kidney grille with floating blocks rather than the typical vertical fins within

the kidneys. The hood is again a clamshell type that reduces the number of visible shut lines for a very clean look. Adrian van Hooydonk, BMW's design chief, has said several times recently that he wants each new BMW model to have its own character—no more “same sausage, different length” design—and clearly the new Z4 is a bold step toward that philosophy. This Z4 is instantly recognizable

as a BMW, yet it is also unique in its form language.

The car itself has grown from the predecessor. It is 82 millimeters longer, 71 millimeters wider, and 12 millimeters taller. Wheelbase at 2,470 millimeters is 26 millimeters shorter than the E89, while track widths (front and rear) are 91 and 55 millimeters wider. We will need to wait for the final U.S. curb weight, but

we were told that the car is more than 50 kilograms lighter than the E89. Some of that weight loss is likely due to the roof design: the new roof looks like a conventional soft top but incorporates a rigid front section that reduces wind noise while still providing a very compact folded package—so compact, in fact, that the G29 has a substantial trunk volume (for a roadster) that remains the same with the

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roof up or down. Additionally, the roof can be raised or lowered in ten seconds at speeds up to 30 mph.

The interior is an improvement over the E89 in terms of materials and finish, as well as systems. The new Z4 incorporates BMW's latest iDrive system, with fully electronic instrument cluster and a huge central screen. The Z4 can also be equipped with the three-color head-up display from the current 5 Series. Overall, I find the cockpit stylish, high in quality, and very functional. The new Z4 will launch in

the USA in March 2019 as the Z430i, powered by a B48 four-cylinder engine. Soon thereafter, the Z4 M40i will begin production and should arrive stateside in the April-May timeframe. The B58 inline six-cylinder turbo engine of the M40i will be familiar to BMW fans, but has now been upgraded to produce 382 horsepower for the U.S. version of the G29; torque is expected to be rated at 369 pound-feet. We were told that this should be good for a 0-60-mph time of about 4.3 seconds.

Interestingly, the European version of the B58 will be equipped with a particulate filter that robs

The G29 Z4 features a soft top with rigid elements; the trunk holds the same amount with the top up or down.

the engine of about 40 horsepower compared to ours—yes, the U.S. version will have more power! All versions are mated to a ZF 8HP automatic transmission; sorry, no manual transmissions, only flappy-paddles. The M40i can be ordered with either eighteen- or nineteen-inch wheels shod with Michelin PSS tires in the same dimensions as the current BMW M3/M4. The car is also equipped with the Active M Differential, an electrically controlled limited-slip differential from the M2. This may not be a pure M car, but it certainly has a lot of M components.

While camouflage blurs the lines of the new Z4, its heritage is unmistakable.



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Suspension is an aluminum double-joint with strut in the front and a steel multi-link setup at the rear, with aluminum uprights at all four corners; the Z4 M40i we drove had the electronically adjustable dampers all around. The chassis is said to be 20% stiffer than the E89, and we can testify that no cowl shake was noticed during our time in the driven-hard-and-put-away-wet prototypes.

U.S. pricing for the cars has not been set yet, but we estimate that the 30i version will be in the \$50,000 range, the M40i to be in the mid-to-high \$60,000s. The new Z4 Roadster will be assembled by Magna in their Graz, Austria plant.

All right, then: How does it

drive? We spent some time in three Euro-spec Z4 M40i prototypes, both on the less-than-perfect secondary roads around Provence as well as several laps around a fast and challenging road circuit at BMW's Miramas test facility. Before we got into the Z4s, we were given a few track familiarization laps in an M2 and an M240i, and I suspect that these car choices were not random. Our first time in the driver's seat of the Z4 was on-track, and frankly, the Z4 performed almost at an M2 level; the driving-dynamics test engineers in the passenger seats who had been tuning the steering feel and suspension of the G29 can be justifiably proud of their accomplishments. This is

The sharply raked windshield is a defining feature of BMW's Z4 roadsters.

Paisley pajamas cannot hide the "flame-surface" concave-convex sidelines of the Z4.

certainly the sharpest handling BMW roadster in a very long time. Of particular note is the great on-center feel of the steering in the Sport setting; their goal was sharper handling than the Porsche 718S. Out on the road, the ride and comfort were substantially better than either of the E85 or E89 Z4s that we last drove.

We will need to wait a few more months before we have the opportunity for a full evaluation of the new Z4, of course, but if our brief drive in these prototypes is an indication, we are going to love this car. Who knows? It could be enough to start growing the roadster segment once again!

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