



## THE M-CAR ALTERNATIVE

Can't wait for the M Roadster? Dinan's S2-Z4 3.0i is available right now with better handling and a power boost that brings the Z4 to life.

By Rich Farquhar  
Photography by Jackie Jouret

We know the M Roadster is going to be the sweetest two-seater on the market. Trouble is, it isn't here yet, and we'll probably have to wait until 2007 to drive one here in the U.S. For some of us, that's simply too long to wait. We need a hot rod Z4, and we need it now. We could go aftermarket, of course, but we don't want to lose the refinement that's characteristic of the genuine BMW article. Time to head

for Morgan Hill, California, then, where the folks at Dinan have been concocting just the right brew of performance and sophistication for the Z4 3.0i.

Where engine power is concerned, Dinan has kept its efforts fairly modest, taking the 3.0-liter six's output from 225 to 239 horsepower and from 228 to 236 lb-ft of torque. Despite the apparently miniscule gain, the benefits of Dinan's ministrations are apparent the moment you touch the throttle.

### Air and electrons

Thanks to software modifications, the delay one normally experiences when asking the stock Z4 for more power is gone, replaced by immediate response from the drive-by-wire throttle to make the car feel much faster even if it isn't. Dinan also reprograms the ECU to liberate another 240 rpm of engine speed (bringing redline to 6,450 rpm) while simultaneously eliminating the car's top speed governor. Going faster than 155 mph in a roadster might not be our idea of a good time, but it's nice to know it's possible.

Along with the software, Dinan also upgrades the Z4's intake and exhaust systems with a ram air duct, a high-volume airbox lid and high-flow filter, a 10% larger-than-stock throttle body and a free-flow exhaust in stainless steel. The ram air duct is quite a nice piece of technology, having been designed using computation fluid analysis to allow maximum air flow with minimum intrusion from water when driving in the rain. In total, the software, intake and exhaust modifications make for a more responsive vehicle, one that sounds great running through the gears.

Responsiveness is further enhanced by a 12% lighter flywheel—which reduces the rotational mass to let the engine spin up faster—and a 3.23:1 differential that replaces the stock 3.07 unit. That's only a 5.2% difference, but it's enough to provide noticeably quicker acceleration without sacrificing much time-in-gear (the extra rpm help here) or top speed.

All of those things are well and good when it comes to making the Z4 feel quicker off the line, but where we really expect Dinan to work its magic is in the suspension department. The company doesn't let us down, either, providing a setup that's sublime where the standard suspension is harsh and that's well-controlled where the stock car bounces and skips.

Dinan's Stage 2 Suspension System includes a set of slightly shorter yet softer springs mated to Koni adjustable shocks and struts valved to Dinan specs. The valving is crucial, as is the tuning of the bump stops, because the Z4 has less suspension travel than a comparable 3 Series and therefore less inherent compliance.

Dinan further adds 25mm front and 22mm rear adjustable anti-roll bars, which bring handling closer to neutral with respect to over- or understeer. Dinan's front camber plates help here, too, by allowing more negative camber for increased grip in the turns.

### Go big for grip

Of course, all the camber in the world won't help if there isn't enough rubber on the pavement, so Dinan goes massive with a set of high-performance—i.e. non run-flat—tires that measure 245/35-19 up front and 275/30-19 at the rear.



That's wonderful for grip, but there's a price to be paid in the form of above-normal tramlining on grooved pavement. The Z4's electric power steering doesn't help here, either—even with the Dinan upgrades, feedback through the wheel still feels artificial though it is improved thanks to the wider rubber. It's precisely that remoteness, however, that prevents even a Dinan Z4 from inspiring as much confidence as, say, an M3.

The upgraded tires are mounted on Dinan's own 9 x 19-inch front and 9.5 x 19-inch rear spread-forged alloy wheels. Dinan claims that its wheels are superbly strong yet light—just 20 lbs. per corner—and we have no reason to doubt it. They're also simple and elegant in their design, without the fussiness or excess of most aftermarket wheels.

Behind them live some of our favorite car parts in the world: Brembo brakes. Steve Dinan may not be a believer, but luckily it isn't necessary to believe in something in order to sell it. For our part, we're downright zealous when it comes to praise for the four-piston calipers and 320mm rotors that grace the front axle of this Z4. The stock brakes are simply unable to match them for either power or feel, or for the amount of confidence we gain from knowing that the Brembos are there.

Between the suspension, brakes, wheels and tires, the Dinan S1-Z4 makes for a marked improvement over the standard Z4 3.0i where chassis performance is concerned, though it's not enough to transform this car into the perfect roadster. There's still something decidedly odd about the Z4, something that keeps it out of the top class of motorcars where outright performance is concerned. The combination of a mega-stiff chassis and a short wheelbase make the package difficult to reckon with in the first place, and the numb steering further reduces driver confidence. Even in Dinan form, the Z4 doesn't quite measure up to the best BMW has to offer.

The M Roadster will likely be another story altogether, and we can't wait to see what Dinan can do with it. Given a better car to start, the Dinan M Roadster will no doubt rectify any disappointment we experienced in learning that not even the masterful Mr. Dinan can conjure perfection out of the flawed Z4. Still, it's much, much closer.