

SUSTAINABILITY AND CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT ARE NEW BY-WORDS FOR LUXURY, TRENDSETTING BRANDS, WRITES **RICHARD WEBB**



Vigilius Mountain Resort

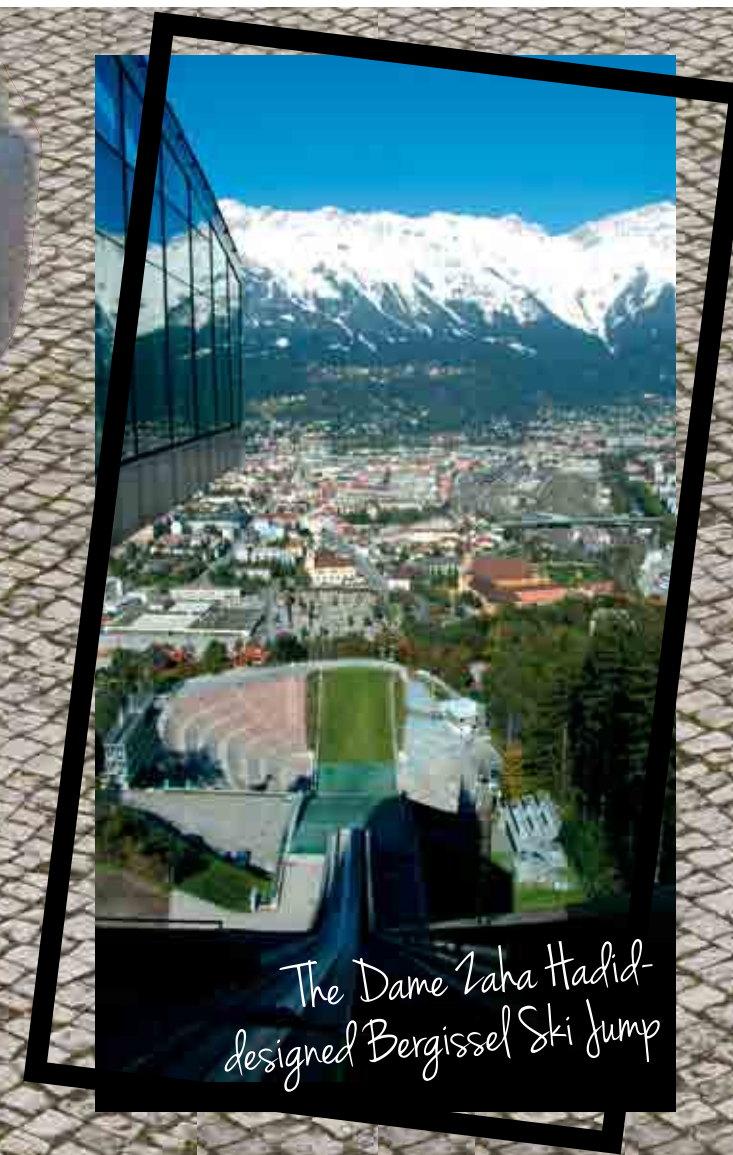
EUROSTYLE



BMW ActiveHybrid 5

Our stewardship of the world's limited resources urges us to be more responsible for the environment, the economy and of the often consumption-driven society in which we live. The desire to reduce our consumption is driving some of the most innovative brands to rethink their business models into new and previously uncharted territory in a relentless drive for efficiency.

But has their drive to reduce consumption and increase sustainability made our life more restrained, less fun and possibly boring? After all, BMW has dropped its glorious sounding BMW 4.4 V8 from the 540i and replaced it with a 3.0 straight six coupled with a 40 kW electric motor. The iconic Riva Shipyard nestled on the edge of Lake Iseo - famed for 150 years of wooden boat craftsmanship - no longer make all of their trademark boats completely from wood but have instead switched to fibreglass. Where's the joy in that? ▶



The Dame Zaha Hadid designed Bergissel Ski Jump

Aquariva Gucci Tender



Or has technology, tradition and innovation combined to create a new world of possibilities while caring for precious resources? Is necessity, as we are often reminded, really the mother of invention? And how has the need for sustainable growth translated into a better consumer experience, if at all? Those were some of the questions I pondered as the SAA Airbus A330-200 banked away from Cape Town, heading towards Germany. I was on my way to join my other media colleagues for the highly prized eighth annual BMW South Africa's EuroStyle Tour.

This tour, like those that swept before it, was painstakingly created by BMW South Africa's Lindsay Pieterse to help join the dots between the need for change, design originality, performance and innovation. Our journey was to commence from BMW Group's spiritual home and Germany's most visited city - Munich. Armed with a fleet of shiny new Bluewater metallic ActiveHybrid 5 vehicles, we eased on to the Inntal Autobahn as it snaked south-west, shadowing the River Inn that would bestow our next destination with its name in the early 13th century.

The seamless border between Germany and Austria flashed by unobserved as we took in the historic Austrian town of Innsbruck. It was here that the BMW ActiveHybrid 5 and I reached an early understanding that would endear me to the car. The combination of the 3.0-litre TwinPower petrol engine and the Lithium Battery-powered motor provided seemingly effortless and often silent power, all wrapped up in a limousine-rivalling ride. A meagre 12 litres of fuel were required to swiftly cover the first 180km that separated us from our Bavarian departure point to this Al-shadowed Tyrolean town.

The BMW South Africa Euro-Style convoy eased south, skirting east of Lake Garda, sweeping theatrically past Romeo and Juliet's hometown, Verona.

As our six identical ActiveHybrid 5's drew to a silent, electrically powered halt outside the PENZ Hotel in the old town square, the panache of the fleet coupled with BMW's continued passion for sustained winter sports sponsorship was not lost on locals. While Innsbruck is known for winter sports, it is also the home to some truly towering architectural achievements. The Dame Zaha Hadid-designed Bergjssel Ski Jump which towers 250 metres over the town, for example, is an unmistakable sporting landmark and the only sports venue in the world to have hosted the opening ceremonies of three separate Olympic Games.

With our Auf Wiederschauen's freshly issued, we glide away purely under electric power up to speeds of 60km/h before the Brenner Pass begs for some serious right pedal mashing. The 225 kW six-cylinder in-line engine steps in with no lag whatsoever, accelerating up to - ahem, well, Autobahn speeds - over the Alps between Italy and Austria. Happily, the trademark BMW aural delights still remain and the car sounds purposeful when pushed. We press on hard as Austria finally yields to Italy.

We sweep into Bolzano Lana, the predominantly German-speaking North Tyrolean Italian town. At 1 500m above sea level, the Vigiliujoch mountain peak is host to the eco-friendly and luxurious Vigilius Mountain Resort. At last there is the promise of

a shower, pillow and a duvet and a decent glass or two of wine.

An exclusive refuge for a fortunate few, architects Matteo Thun and Christina Biasi von Berg designed the resort to resemble the nature that surrounds it, with influence coming from a fallen tree in the forest. In harmony with BMW's own sustainability values, the grass-covered roof is an ecologically sound and aesthetically pleasing solution to energy conservation and is inspired by the unerring rhythm of nature. The mother of invention is not slumbering here, it would seem.

The Dolomites are clearly visible from the resort and glow crimson in the sunset. This glow is called 'Enrosadüra' and has given rise to legends of nymphs and moon princesses. I left my window open that evening in the hope to encounter one or more of them, but alas, it was not to be.

The BMW South Africa EuroStyle convoy eased south, skirting east of Lake Garda, sweeping theatrically past Romeo and Juliet's hometown, Verona. The Autostrada snakes north again through the green Venetian lowlands to Lombardy's Vicenza, famous for its art, refined architecture and harmonious forms. There, we encounter the romantic Lake Iseo and the gentle Franciacorta Hills that provide the setting for Italy's answer to Champagne.

Bellavista Winery cannot claim the illustrious, centuries old heritage of Reims, France, but this Champenoise is, however, on a par with some of France's finest. Winemaker Mattia Vezzola employs Metodo Clasico to produce several vintage and non-vintage sparkling wines. "Quality doesn't cost anything. Sooner or later, nature will give it to you. The difficulty is keeping up the perseverance," says Vezzola.

Such is the lure of the *bollicine* (little bubbles) that it is with a palpable sense of loss that we hand in our cherished ActiveHybrid 5 keys to BMW's accomplished chauffeurs for the rest of the BMW South Africa EuroStyle Tour.

We are driven north to Sarnico and the world-famous Riva Shipyard. In the 1960s, Riva faced significant challenges that sustainability demanded. Carlo Riva realised the construction of entirely wooden boats was coming to an end and fiberglass would offer the sustainability the firm demanded. ▶



The Concorso d'Eleganza



BMW Zagato



Castadiva
Resort & Spa

Riva's legend started in a humble shed 170 years ago but it is the 33-foot powerboat Aquariva that reflects Riva's style evolution most over the years. Sergio Beretta of Officina Italiana Design (the firm that designs all Riva boats) told us in his typically understated prose, "We aim to create boats with a long-lasting design. We absorbed Riva history to create the Aquariva, but also forget it in a certain sense, in order to create a contemporary product."

Riva's unique craftsmanship, care for detail and unrivalled skills have taken a fibreglass hull and detailed it with a classic varnish finish of mahogany - 20 coats in all. This creates an evolution of the essence of Riva while embracing the most advanced technological developments.

The event is a true contest of elegance, with a deep respect to the impact and importance of the style and engineering of when the cars were first built.

The final leg of the tour seductively beckons the ActiveHybrid 5 cars along the arrow-straight Milano-Brescia Autostrada south, then west, before turning north to Lombardy, the Alps and at last, Lake Como. In 1790, William Wordsworth described Lake Como as 'a treasure which the earth keeps to itself'. Clearly no longer quite that secret, many celebrities became locals on the shores of Lake Como: Madonna, George Clooney, Gianni Versace, Ronaldinho and Sir Richard Branson to note a few.

The *pièce de résistance* was alighting at Cernobbio on the shores of Lake Como, where a selection of classic and concept cars awaited us. The Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este is partnered by BMW Group and judged by an exclusive panel of judges led by president Lorenzo Ramaciotti. The event is a true contest of elegance, with a deep respect to the impact and importance of the style and engineering of when the cars were first built.

French writer, André Malraux once said, "If you want to design the future, you must leaf through the past." This would appear to apply to the Concorso, BMW and Rolls-Royce alike as BMW Group was voted the World's Most Sustainable Carmaker - for the seventh year in a row. So when Bodo Donaver, Managing Director of BMW South Africa speaks on the subject, it has real gravitas. "BMW has become far more to South African society than simply a manufacturer of vehicles for the local market," he says. "Over time, our company has deeply ingrained itself into the very fabric of this country, championing a sustainable economic growth, better-quality education, disease prevention and community development."

As the tour drew to a close I had the overwhelming sense that all of the sustainable, responsible brands we encountered are alive to the fact we must work together and be part of an international quest towards a low-carbon economy. So has the drive to reduce consumption and increase sustainability made our lives more restrained, less fun and well, boring? On the contrary, I believe that the answer to this question is a resounding "no." Thanks to 2012 BMW South Africa EuroStyle Tour, I have seen the future. And it works. 💎

