



# ACCIDENTAL TOURING CAR

*Bob and Sandra Gay's tastefully-prepped BMW 325is punches far above its class*

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By Steven Scala

**Bob and Sandra Gay had enough experience with lapping days that by 2001, they knew exactly what they wanted in a track car. Safety and reliability were top priorities, and this straight, rust-free 1994 BMW 325is would provide a competent platform.**

Prepared in Richmond Hill, ON at Raven Performance Inc., the 325is received a brace of safety upgrades for track use: a chromoly cage for rollover protection would also tie in the strut towers, and an OMP 'Big' seat with velcro-fastened cushions and rail mounting would accommodate Bob and Sandra's height difference. Proper safety harnesses were also installed.

The car's original 2.5-litre straight six and automatic transmission weren't up





for track duty, and were supplanted with a fresher Euro-spec S50 M3 motor with OEM five-speed transmission. Parking brake, lighting and emissions equipment were maintained, and the couple had a comfortable, handy and competent trackday car that could pound the pavement all weekend, and drive home again from the track.

The car handled over 30 such events a year, driven by both Bob and Sandra for lapping and instructor duty at BMW club schools. When insurance went up for renewal early in 2003, Bob disclosed the car's modifications and use. Ill-informed as they prefer to be, the insurance companies denied coverage and effectively rendered the car illegal for street use.

Elsewhere, the region's sanctioning body had begun serious efforts to reach out to more racers. Among these initiatives, the ActionFront BMW series was founded in 2003 to offer a consistent schedule of local events to BMW club racers, and to showcase the region's close and clean competition to the new group.

Bob and Sandra wisely reallocated their insurance savings toward preparing the car for full-on racing. The pair would now be out-braking competitors in anger, and were equipped with a braking system developed by Raven and KVR Performance. Raven's John Dimoff notes that his company is a "huge fan of good brakes" and it shows: this application features AP Racing calipers squeezing Hawk HT-10 pads on Coleman rotors. KVR-fabricated disk hats and caliper brackets connect the dots, and AP Racing 600 fluid fills the lines.

Inside, an AP adjustment valve allows cockpit adjustment for brake bias, and lives with an OMP suede-covered steering wheel. A set of generic pedal covers to help with downshifts. A standard instrument cluster sits ahead, and may be replaced with SPA electronic instruments in the future.

Outside, bodywork modifications include an M3 front bumper cover, side skirts and rear bumper cover with integral diffuser. A Bimmerworld front splitter and undertray were added for front downforce, and out back, BMW's spoiler as issued on the North American E36 M3 Lightweight. The left-side headlight was replaced with a custom air intake by Raven Performance.



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## 7 1/4" x 4 3/4"



The S50 B30 euro-spec engine is completely stock between the throttle body and exhaust, and is good for 286 horsepower at 7,000 rpm, with 236 lb-ft of torque at 3,600 rpm. The car was dyno-verified to meet the factory figures, as fitted with a custom stainless exhaust aft of the factory header.

"The header itself is a nice piece," adds Dimoff.

This car is a giant killer in regional competition, despite its OEM power. In its second racing season, Bob drove the Franken-3 to win the CASC Ontario Touring GT Championship outright, beating more powerful machinery in the process. In the same season, Sandra drove the car to seventh overall in the region's open GT sprints, again overcoming a significant deficit to even more powerful competition.

Remarkably, Bob insists that "There's more in the car than we're getting out of it. We're not gonna buy more speed until we stop getting faster as drivers." Bob's modesty is astounding, and together

with Sandra, the pair are genuinely very sporting competitors. "The joy for us is to show up and participate," Bob adds.

The 325is certainly hasn't held them back, as it's handled double-duty race weekends without any major breakdowns. "It seems to hang together, by any stretch," notes Bob, who is "a fiend for replacing consumables." Four years after the car's initial buildup, the 3 is on its second transmission, and is receiving new rod bearings for 2005.

The euro-spec M3's OEM oil cooler must help, but the oiling and cooling systems are otherwise stock. A vaned differential cover has cooled the factory 325is diff. A shorter final drive is being swapped in this season, though as competitors have noted, Bob and Sandra never looked squirrely on track, so it's presumed that traction hasn't been a problem.

A 2004-season move from 235/40-17 race rubber to 255/40-17 also haven't hurt. Tires are the Toyo Proxes RA1's mandated for CASC-OR's Ontario Touring GT

Championship, shaved to minimum depth. They're mounted on SSR Integral GT1 wheels, which were chosen as much for being readily available as they were for their strength and light weight.

A BMW Gruppe N suspension package puts the Toyos to work, with competition-tuned shock valving, adjustable swaybars, and uprated spring rates. Ride heights are adjustable by over two inches all around.

Some of the factory understeer has been tuned out with some of the adjustable bars, again without compromising traction at corner exit. The car is "nicely balanced," notes John Dimoff, and competitors have attested to this, noting the car's remarkable lap-to-lap consistency.

The Bimmer shows no sign of letting up, and is a race winner with more than enough development potential to cover its GT competition. Despite being built without racing in mind, this 3-series has proven to be at home winning races, and willing to stay there. ■

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