

BMW i8 and i3



By [Ilse van den Berg](#)

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When you get into a car with flip-up, gull-wing doors, you cannot help but feel excited. Especially if it's a BMW i8 Roadster and it's the *only* one in South Africa.



What's it like?

i8 Roadster and i8 Coupe

Of late, we've had the SUV and compact SUV trend dominate the media and the roads (in addition to the classic, popular hatchbacks); so when I was invited to the launch of the BMW i8 and i3 last week, I was as excited as Doc about his "latest experiment" - the "big one" he'd been "waiting for all his life" (PS. I'm referring to the DeLorean in *Back to the Future*).

The main thing that makes me think back to this scene is, of course, the very futuristic look of the car - including the flip-up doors.

Although, the BMW is *obviously* way lighter, sleeker, sexier, and definitely more environmentally friendly. I mean, just look at it... and don't tell me you're not swooning over it...



The i8 Roadster is the third car in the i lineup. The first two being the i3 and the i8 Coupe. We got a chance to experience all three i cars on the day and the route - which included Clarens Drive, Franschoek Pass, and the N1 - gave us a pretty good feel of the vehicles' handling, speed, and driving pleasure.

The i8 Roadster and Coupe turned heads wherever we went and beat the bends with seemingly no effort at all. Comfort and luxury abounds in both cabins.



These are the perfect cars for scenic routes - especially when you drop the top of the Roadster... It makes you want to drive for days and never get out of the car!

i3



The BMW i3 has not only gained refreshing styling accents, cutting-edge equipment features and new digital services, but also a new model variant.

My first drive in the i3 was not what I expected. It's a cute, sporty but also rather strange-looking BMW if compared to all the other models but, then again, it's a *completely different* BMW.

In fact, its avant-garde exterior styling has already picked up the iF Gold award for product design and the World Car Design of the Year award.

I found it a pretty comfortable car with the seating position much higher than initially anticipated and, hence, it gives the driver a better view and more confidence on the road. It's **small (but still very spacious), nippy, and feels extremely light and responsive**.

After driving the i8 Coupe and i8 Roadster, I'd be lying if I said I was crazy about the i3's interior looks. I didn't hate it either, but there were just some things that caught my eye that I didn't find particularly sexy.



What makes up for it though is the fact that **over 80% of the surfaces visible to the passengers are made from recycled materials or renewable resources**. How cool is that!?

How about engine and safety stuff?

i8 Roadster and i8 Coupe

Now, I know you might be curious about how the powertrain works in a plug-in hybrid sports car ... as was I. The i8s are powered by a drive duo in the form of a hybrid synchronous electric motor and a three-cylinder petrol engine with BMW TwinPower Turbo technology.

The engine's power is channelled to the rear wheels through a six-speed Steptronic transmission, while the electric motor propels the front wheels via a two-speed automatic gearbox. All of this technical talk summed up basically gives you a hybrid-specific all-wheel-drive system that glues the powerful car to the road.



The energy capacity of the latest version of the model-specific lithium-ion battery is far greater - battery cell capacity has increased from 20 to 34 ampere hours (Ah) and gross energy capacity from 7.1 to 11.6 kilowatt hours (kWh, net energy capacity: 9.4 kWh).

These extra energy reserves have made it possible to raise the electric motor's peak output to 105kW. It generates its

maximum torque of 250Nm from rest, which is a thrilling experience and means it is ideally equipped to deliver razor-sharp responses to the slightest touch to the accelerator. The i8 Coupe accelerates from 0-100km/h in 4.4 seconds, while the i8 Roadster takes a tick longer to get from 0-100km/h with a time of 4.6 seconds. Both models have an electronically limited top speed of 250km/h.

The system output produced by the electric motor and engine acting in unison has increased to 275kW in both the new i8 Coupe and i8 Roadster.

i3

The synchronous electric motor powering the new i3 delivers 125kW of power and 250Nm of torque - available instantly from a standstill. It has a single-speed automatic transmission with continuous power delivery. The i3 sprints from 0-100 km/h in 7.3 seconds and its top speed is 150km/h.



What else?

i8 Roadster and i8 Coupe

According to BMW, its i8 has been the world's highest-selling hybrid sports car since it launched in 2014.

Combined fuel consumption, as calculated in the EU test cycle for plug-in hybrid vehicles, stands at 1.8 litres per 100km for the i8 Coupe and 2.0 litres per 100km for the BMW i8 Roadster – which equates to petrol CO2 emissions of 42 and 46 grams per kilometre respectively – plus 14.0 kWh of electricity for the BMW i8 Coupe and 14.5 kWh for the BMW i8 Roadster. In everyday driving, both models return fuel consumption and emissions figures that undercut those for conventionally powered sports cars with similar outputs by around 50%!

Both the i8 Coupe and i8 Roadster are based on the LifeDrive vehicle architecture designed for BMW i cars. The aluminium Drive module brings together the powertrain, high-voltage battery, suspension, crash system and structural functions, while the Life module takes the form of a passenger cell hewn from carbon-fibre-reinforced plastic (CFRP).

The two-seater i8 Roadster's exterior is aerodynamically optimised with its aforementioned gullwing doors and a soft-top roof that opens and closes in 15 seconds at a speed of 50km/h.



What's also pretty impressive is that the i8 Roadster can now cover up to 53km with zero local emissions in the NEDC test cycle and the i8 Coupe up to 55km.

i3

The BMW i3 has reportedly been the top-selling premium electric car in its class since 2014, not just in Europe, but worldwide.

It comes equipped with all-LED headlights as standard, which employ LED bulb units for dipped beam and high beam as well as the daytime running lights.

The design principle of the four-seater model means there is no need for either fixed B-pillars or a transmission tunnel. The rear passenger doors actually open in opposite directions - with the handles neatly hidden on the inside of the car (so you have to open the front doors first to be able to open the rear doors).



How many bucks?

Okay, folks! Hold on to your hats and, if you're standing, maybe consider sitting down.

- **i8 Roadster:** R2,329,300

- **i8 Coupe:** R2,095,200
- **i3 94Ah:** R637,300
- **i3 94 Ah:** REX R717,100

Conclusion

The new BMW i8 Roadster takes the i8's combination of locally emission-free mobility and high-calibre performance and sprinkles the drop-top driving experience into the mix.

Look, the i8 series might not be very practical for people who are not so agile or flexible (or those wearing dresses or skirts!) and it takes a while to get used to double checking your surroundings before flipping up the door, but it looks absolutely smashing and drives like a dream (the best dream I could possibly imagine).

The i8s are definitely not the fastest sports cars on the planet but they are probably some of the best ones out there when it comes to lightening your footprint on the planet while still giving you a more-than-thrilling driving experience - all the while turning heads as you fly by.

The i series cars offer a premium-quality, all-electric driving experience, together with a whole new level of connectivity technology and, best of all, zero CO2 emissions.

I can't help but want to give BMW a pat on the back as the i series surely represents the future of zero-emission urban mobility.

ABOUT ILSE VAN DEN BERG

Ilse is a freelance journalist and editor with a passion for people & their stories (check out Passing Stories). She is also the editor of Go & Travel, a platform connecting all the stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry. You can check out her work here and here. Contact Ilse through her website here.

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