



Three For

MOST TUNER CLASSICS WIND UP IN MUSEUMS—OR THE LANDFILL—

Traditionally—in the Days Before Dinan—BMW tuner cars were built or modified by a small cadre of European performance companies. They were very exclusive, very expensive, very fast, and very rare—especially in America, where few small companies can afford to traverse the legal wasteland of U.S. safety and emissions legislation to certify their cars for sale here. Fortunately, BMW itself has filled some of the void with its legendary M cars, which are essentially factory tuner cars; some purists remind us of the pre-M efforts like the 3.0CSL coupe and the 2002 Turbo. BMW Motorsport GmbH, corporate predecessor of today's BMW M brand, had a hand in these models; all carried the trademark BMW Motorsport tri-color graphics. Unfortunately, their sales were mostly limited to well-heeled serious European drivers.



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The Road

BUT THESE THREE RARE BMWs SPEND THEIR TIME ON THE ROAD.

But while none were brought to the U.S. officially—at least not in their unrestrained European personae—some few immigrants made it to our shores, and a few of those survive today, legendary collector tuner cars from the vaunted shops of Alpina, Hartge, and AC Schnitzer. Most of the rare survivors are treated as museum relics—but a few fell into the hands of Club enthusiasts who haven't forgotten the cars' original purpose. Never pristine garage queens, unrestored, and sometimes modified to suit their owners in ways that would make a concours purist faint, they are nevertheless what the marque has always been about: high-spirited driving at its best.

Staggered headlamps, European bumper, and single wiper distinguish Paul Alber's Hartge H5S.



Paul Alber's 1985 Hartge H5S

Hartge is another German firm that has specialized in creating higher performance BMWs. They've been around since 1971, but like Alpina, they have very little U.S. presence and are concerned primarily with the current model-year BMW lineup; Hartge's web site at www.hartge.de

shows parts offerings only for current models.

The E28 5 Series was BMW's workhorse sedan from 1982-1988. In U.S. trim, it was available with five different engines during its tenure. While the legendary M5 reigns supreme in the E28 pecking order, the venerable 535i is the most popular enthusiast

choice. It is this car upon which Hartge based their magnificent H5S variant.

Resplendent in Bahama Metallic—a color rarely used on U.S.-specification E28s—Alber's H5S is clearly the most subdued of our trio. But BMW enthusiasts spot it right away as something special. The European-specification bumpers, cockpit-adjustable H1/H4 headlights, Hartge front air dam housing, unique front turn-signal assemblies, mono-arm wiper, and the Hartge aerodynamic panels are unlike anything ever offered by BMW of North America. Hartge 16x7.5" and 16x8.5" wheels fill the front and rear wheel housings with 205/55VR-16 and 225/50VR-16 tires. The Germans also modified the rear quarter panels for additional tire clearance. Hartge, like Alpina, employed this staggered size combination to reduce oversteer at the limits of adhesion. Alber decided to dial in a little more oversteer by going to 225/50VR-16 tires at all four corners. Yokohama A509s are the H5S's current sneakers.

Inside, the buffalo-leather Recaro interior in a curious brown color further sets the H5S apart from its U.S.-bound E28 brethren. A MOMO Hartge steering wheel provides tactile sensation. While the Hartge speedometer was actually stolen at one



Brown buffalo-hide Recaros aren't seen very often in the U.S., either.

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The Hartge H5S engine room is well detailed, if somewhat undramatic.



point and replaced with a U.S. gauge, the original owner opted against the traditional top-of-the-dash Hartge three-gauge cluster normally housing an oil pressure, oil temperature, and voltmeter from VDO. Amazingly, this is one of few E28s we've seen equipped with a rear sunshade.

Underpinning the Hartge H5S are standard spring and sway bar upgrades, but Alber has fitted a set of Bilstein Sport shocks in place of the original Hartge-specification Bilsteins, which had valving too soft for his tastes. While this would

seem to contradict what we know of Hartge-spec Bilsteins, bear in mind many of these cars were custom-built to satisfy individual owners; it's entirely possible that the original purchaser of this H5S specified "comfort" shock valving. Alber also fitted a set of high-performance control-arm bushings similar to those found on the E32 750iL to guard against the notorious E28 front vibration problems.

Hartge left the brakes rather underdone on this particular model, opting to stay with the stock rotors and modifying the system only

with larger front calipers and custom Hartge brake pads—long since replaced with PBR MetalMasters. (This is surprising, given the raft of brake rotor warping problems from which many an E28 suffers.) Hartge is well recognized for their stellar drivetrain performance, and this H5S incorporates a healthy dose. The 3.5-liter M30 engine was also BMW's workhorse, and it survived the E28 to be fitted in E34 5 Series cars through the early 1990s. Hartge modified the BMW engine with larger valves, a 298-degree camshaft, an oil cooler, higher-compression pistons, and some fairly secretive cylinder head work, for a 240-hp output; saddled with low-compression pistons, a stock camshaft, and a restrictive exhaust system mandated by emission-control regulations, the U.S.-specification 1985 535i struggled to squeak out a scant 182. Backing up the mighty M30 is a Getrag 262 close-ratio five-speed manual gearbox and a 3.25 75% limited-slip differential.

Interestingly, Alber's dad, Ed, along with his friend Scott Epstein, actually imported Hartge cars in the 1980s through Performance Plus in Dania, Florida. They brought in about 25 E28s—and this was one of them. Alber has had his eye out for a Hartge H5S since then. Two prior owners kept trading this car back and forth for years until Alber managed to wrench it away from both of them in 1999. Since then, it's provided daily driver duty and attended Peachtree Chapter and other Club events throughout the south. ♦

