

# An i4 an eye

Hammer and tongs, tooth and nail; the rivalry between these musclebound electric cars will be seriously hard fought

Photography: John Bradshaw

**NEW**

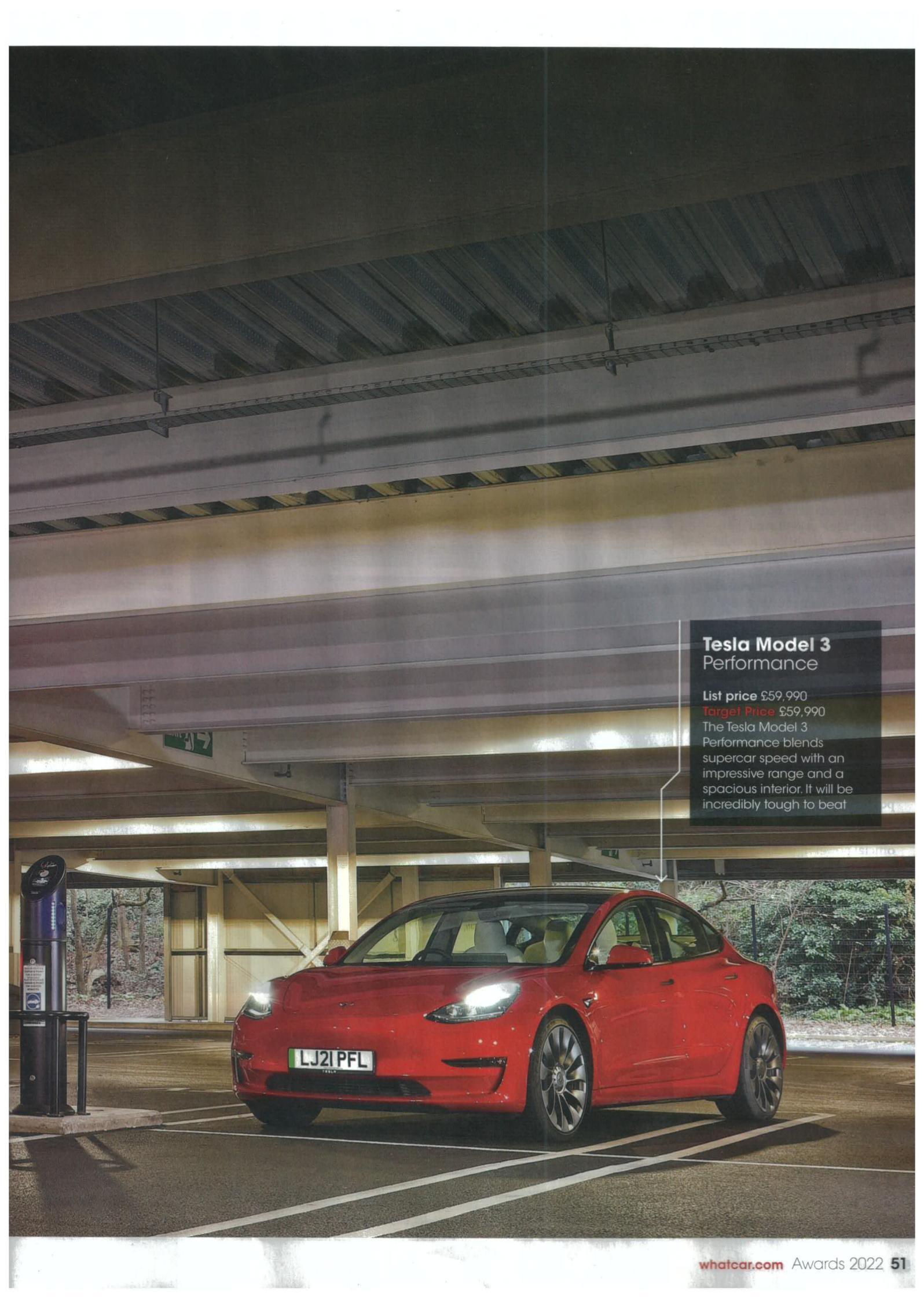
## BMW i4 M50

List price £63,905

Target Price £63,905

BMW's legendary M division has been responsible for producing some of the finest driver's cars of all time, so we have high hopes for its first pure electric model





**Tesla Model 3**  
Performance

List price £59,990

**Target Price** £59,990

The Tesla Model 3 Performance blends supercar speed with an impressive range and a spacious interior. It will be incredibly tough to beat

## COMPARISON

R

emember when Elon Musk tweeted in support of Kanye West's presidential run, or when

he suddenly announced that Tesla would accept a form of cryptocurrency named after an internet meme? The Tesla CEO's Twitter page is full of wild claims and questionable statements, but perhaps the most memorable for us car lovers is when he claimed that the then yet-to-be-released Tesla Model 3 Performance would be quicker around a racetrack than the legendary BMW M3.

As statements go, it was bold. Sure, an electric vehicle (EV) may be quicker in a straight line than a petrol-powered performance saloon – indeed, the larger Model S had already proved that. But an EV that could outperform an M3 around a track? It just didn't seem possible, until all of sudden, it was.

Within months of the Model 3 being released, various people around the world proved that, in the right conditions, it could indeed go quicker than the BMW around a racetrack. This not only generated great publicity for the Californian company but also gave more credence to those who see Musk as something of a marketing genius.

Now, though, it's finally time for BMW to get its own back. Designed to directly compete with the Model 3 Performance, the all-new i4 M50 is the "first purely electric performance car" from BMW's M division, and it's not lacking in firepower; with 536bhp on tap, it's more potent than the latest petrol-powered M3 (503bhp) and not far off the Model 3's rumoured 563bhp figure (Tesla doesn't publish official power figures).

BMW also promises that the range-topping i4 should be able to match the day-to-day usability of the Model 3 by combining the "fabled sporting prowess" of M cars with "a range that also convinces over long journeys". To that end, it gets adaptive suspension with air springs at the back, and a large (80.7kWh) battery to keep it going for as long as possible.

### DRIVING

Performance, ride, handling, refinement

Despite having the word 'performance' in its name, nothing about the Model 3 screams that you're behind the wheel of a monstrously quick car. There's no launch control, no motor noise and no gimmicky driving modes that 'unleash' maximum power or deliver 'ludicrous' acceleration.

BMW i4



Despite the promise of its name, the i4 M50 doesn't deliver the poise and immediate steering response we'd expect of an "M-car". It is, though, the quieter and more comfortable car on the motorway, and its adaptive suspension is more adept at soaking up the bumps of broken urban roads



Most of the i4's interior materials feel more special, and the standard of assembly is higher than in the Model 3

TESLA MODEL 3



The Model 3's steering is sharp and direct if not as feelsome as that of the best combustion-engined cars. It also leans less in corners than the much heavier i4, and changes direction more promptly as a result. The frameless windows generate a lot of wind noise at higher speeds, though



Some will find the Model 3's interior refreshingly uncluttered, but others will think it austere. Practicality impresses, though

All you have to do to embarrass a supercar at the lights is deactivate creep mode (so you don't have to hold the car on the brakes), stamp on the accelerator and hold on to the steering wheel for dear life.

And you really do have to hold on. Our Model 3 test car – in cold, wet conditions – returned a 0-60mph time of just 3.4sec. Not only is that quicker than a Porsche 911 Carrera S, but the Tesla nailed that time without generating so much as a chirrup of wheelspin.

The i4, meanwhile, goes about its business in quite a different way. As well as having launch control, it features a 'Sport Boost' mode that give you access to the full 536bhp. You also get an Iconic Sounds function; when activated, this delivers a sonic 'composition' from film-score maestro Hans Zimmer that gets louder as your speed increases.

This sci-fi soundtrack, combined with the launch control, makes launching the i4 a more exciting experience, but check the stopwatch and you'll find it is nearly half a second slower to 60mph. The reason? Well, it's twofold. First, the i4 struggles for traction off the line, with its front wheels scrabbling for grip all the way to the national speed limit, despite the fact that it (like its rival) has four-wheel drive. And second, the i4 weighs roughly 350kg more than the Model 3, and not a great deal less than a Range Rover.

Now, it's worth emphasising at this point that the i4 is still scorchingly quick by conventional standards – with a 0-60mph time of 3.8sec, it's just as fast as an M3 – but there is simply no hiding that extra weight in corners. The i4 suffers more from body lean through quick bends, and that means it takes a moment longer to react when you ask it to change direction. And despite the fact that both cars are fitted with the same Pirelli P Zero tyres, the i4 also runs out of grip sooner.

Neither car has the sort of delicate, feelsome steering that the best petrol-powered performance saloons are blessed with. We reckon the 'Standard' steering weighting is preferable in the Model 3 and 'Sport' is best in the i4, but whichever setting you choose, the i4's steering is slower and more relaxed, while the Model 3's is sharp and direct. We prefer the extra precision afforded by the Tesla's faster steering when driving quickly, but the i4's steering suits its more relaxed demeanour.

Speaking of which, the i4 is, without a doubt, the more relaxing car in which to cover big miles. With its suspension in Comfort mode, it's particularly smooth >>

## COMPARISON

and controlled at motorway speeds, while around town it does a much better job of rounding off sharp abrasions and cushioning you from harsh impacts. It also suffers much less from wind and road noise than the Model 3, whose frameless side windows create quite a bit of buffeting at 70mph.

The Model 3 hits back, however, with a significantly better range. With both cars' batteries charged to 90%, we drove a route that included simulated motorway, country roads and town driving (in convoy at our test track so that traffic conditions wouldn't influence the results) and the Model 3's trip computer claimed it had returned 3.1 miles per kWh, giving it a theoretical range of 233 miles. The i4, meanwhile, was slightly less efficient, using a kWh every 2.3 miles, giving it a theoretical range of 185 miles. It was jolly chilly, though, with an air temperature of around 3deg C.

### BEHIND THE WHEEL

Driving position, visibility, build quality

Both cars have fundamentally sound driving positions, including pedals that line up neatly with the seat and steering wheel, but the i4 places you much closer to the road than you are in the Model 3. That fact, combined with a driver's seat that has significantly better side support than the church pews you get in the Model 3, means that the i4 not only feels more like a traditional performance car from behind the wheel, but it's also much less tiring to drive quickly. In the Model 3, you have to brace yourself against the door or centre console to keep from sliding out of the seat in fast corners.

That's not to mention the fact that finding your ideal driving position in the Model 3 is a challenge in itself. From adjusting the door mirrors to tweaking the reach and rake of the steering wheel, you have to delve into the massive (15.0in) central touchscreen while twiddling with the scroll buttons on the steering wheel. It's a frustrating process and not advisable while driving. That's why we prefer the more conventional layout in the i4, with physical buttons to adjust the mirrors, steering wheel and digital instruments, placed exactly where you'd find them in the 4 Series Gran Coupé on which it's based.

The i4 also benefits from sharing the 4 Series Gran Coupé's crisp and easy-to-read 12.3in digital instrument panel and has a configurable head-up display projected onto the windscreen, to ensure that key information is

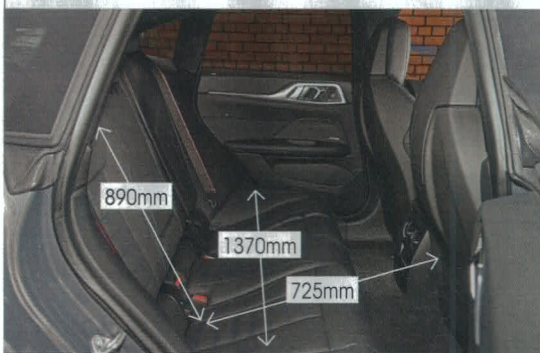
BMW i4



**1** The optional carbonfibre trim and tri-colour stitching on the steering wheel reminds you that you're driving a car with BMW M division connections

**2** Handy head-up display projects key driving information onto the windscreen, directly in your line of sight – a feature not offered in the Model 3

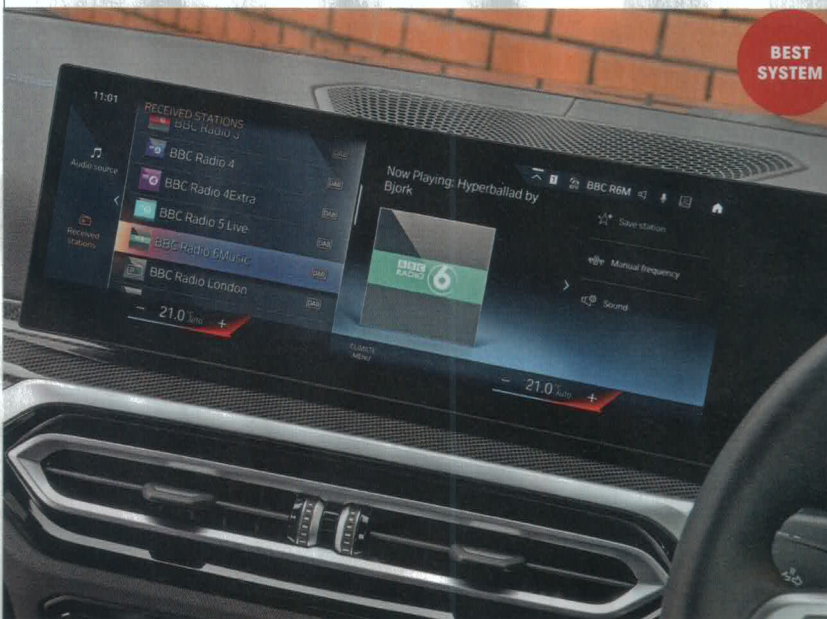
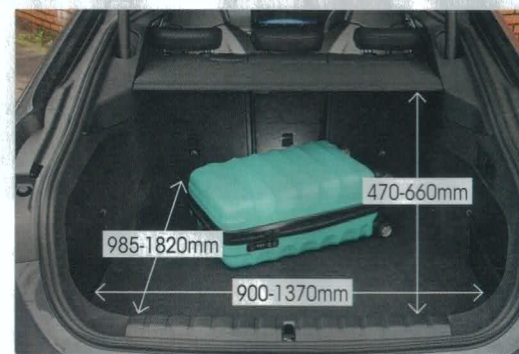
**3** The i4's seats feature far more aggressive bolstering than the Model 3's, so they hold you in place better through corners



Leg room is plentiful in the rear of the i4, but taller passengers will have to duck their heads. A hatchback tailgate gives great access to the boot and the rear seats split in a handy 40/20/40 configuration



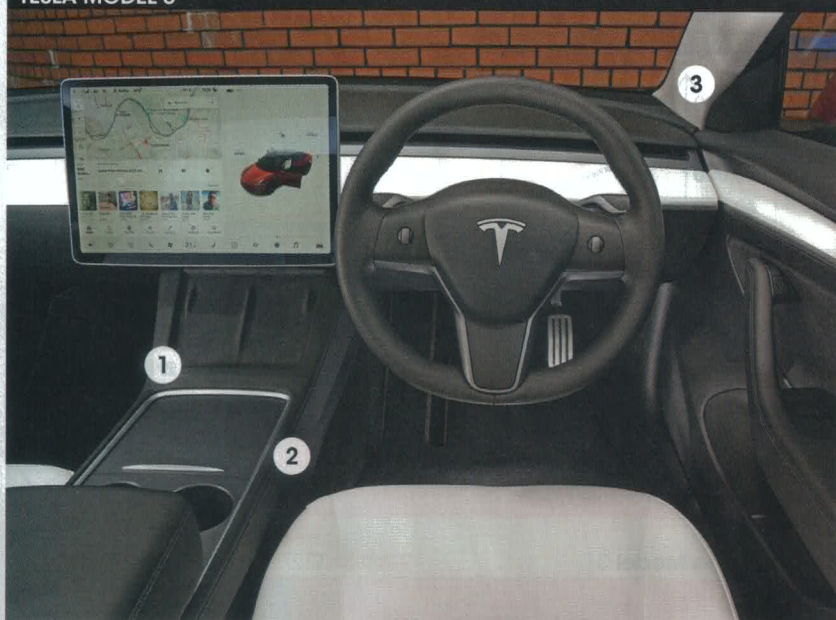
Boot capacity 470 litres  
Suitcases 7



### INFOTAINMENT

With multi-layered menus, this latest iDR system isn't quite as intuitive as the one it replaces, but it's still the best system around. It's quick to respond to inputs, has pin-sharp graphics and its physical rotary controller makes it a breeze to use on the move. Unlike the Model 3, the i4 gives you smartphone mirroring so you can use your phone's apps via the central screen, and the 17-speaker Harman Kardon stereo sounds beautifully balanced.

## TESLA MODEL 3



**1** The dual wireless charging pads are well integrated and work surprisingly well, holding your phone in place when driving spiritedly

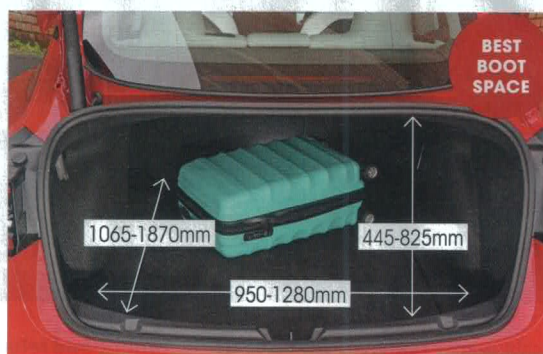
**2** The interior of the Model 3 is almost too understated, with no visual clues to remind you that you're driving the Performance variant

**3** Chunky windscreen pillars can interfere with your view at junctions, plus adjusting the mirrors requires going through fiddly on-screen menus



Raw measurements don't convey how much more rear head room the Model 3 has. The 92-litre 'frunk' can swallow a carry-on bag, adding to overall boot capacity

Boot capacity 450 litres (r),  
92 litres (f)  
Suitcases 10



## INFOTAINMENT

The Model 3's infotainment system doesn't provide any physical controls; everything is controlled through the huge 15.0in touchscreen, making it more distracting to use while driving. However, the menus are more intuitive to navigate than the multi-layered ones in the i4, and the screen is sharp and bright. There are neat features, such as Netflix streaming and video games, too – perfect for entertainment while the car is charging.

always in your line of sight. That's not the case in the Model 3, where all of your information, including your speed and navigation instructions, is displayed on the central screen. Mercifully, Tesla has placed the speed readout in the top right-hand corner of the screen so you don't have to tilt your head too far to read it, but it's still not ideal.

The i4 also has the edge when it comes to interior quality. Following its facelift last year, the Model 3 may feel more robust than earlier models, but the German car uses a more premium mix of materials; the 'vegan' leather seats in the Model 3, for example, don't feel as plush as the real leather seats in the i4, and some of the trim panel gaps are a little inconsistent. There is no arguing, however, that the Model 3's minimalist design will appeal to a large number of buyers.

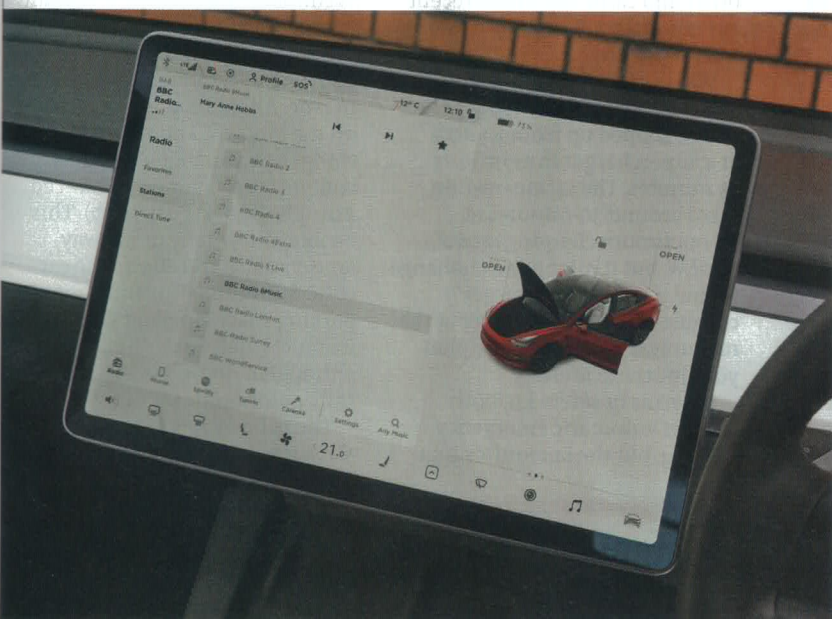
## SPACE AND PRACTICALITY

Front space, rear space, seating flexibility, boot

In both cars, front seat occupants have an abundance of head and leg room, but the same can't be said for those sitting in the back of the i4. Despite having a fairly tall roofline for a four-door coupé, an elevated rear seating position (both the floor and rear bench are higher than they are in the 4 Series Gran Coupé) means occupants will have to tilt their heads to avoid making contact with the ceiling. You can get around this by slouching down a little; there's enough leg room to allow you to do that, but it's not ideal when you're on a long journey.

The Model 3 is much better in this respect. Although the measurements are little different, its roof curves in such a way that there's actually appreciably more rear head room than in the i4, and the feeling of spaciousness is enhanced by the Model 3's taller side windows and standard-fit panoramic glass roof. What's more, because the Model 3 has been designed from the ground up to be an EV, there's no central floor hump for the middle seat passenger to straddle – an obstacle they'll encounter in the i4.

The Model 3 continues to pull out a lead when it comes to luggage capacity, because it has both a rear boot and a smaller 'frunk' under the bonnet. The i4 doesn't afford you this luxury; open its bonnet and all you'll find is a plastic cover sitting atop its front electric motor. So, despite having a wider rear boot aperture than the Model 3 (due to it being a hatchback rather than a saloon), the i4 can accommodate only eight carry-on suitcases, >>>



# COMPARISON

WHAT THEY WILL COST All prices correct at time of testing

## BMW i4

List price £63,905  
Target Price £63,905

## Tesla Model 3

List price £59,990  
Target Price £59,990



SCAN TO BUY  
THIS CAR NOW



## PCP FINANCE COSTS

Three-year term, £6000 customer deposit, 10,000 miles per year

Monthly cost £963 £977

Manufacturer deposit contribution na na

Optional final payment £30,588 £24,596

Representative APR 4.9% 4.9%

Excess mileage charge 17p per mile 14p per mile

Other fees na na

## CONTRACT HIRE

Three-year term, £6000 deposit, 10,000 miles per year

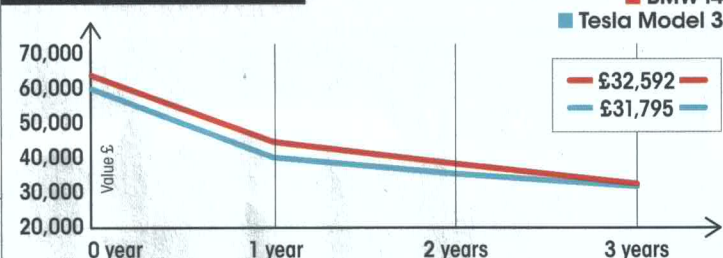
Monthly cost £968 £944

## COMPANY CAR TAX

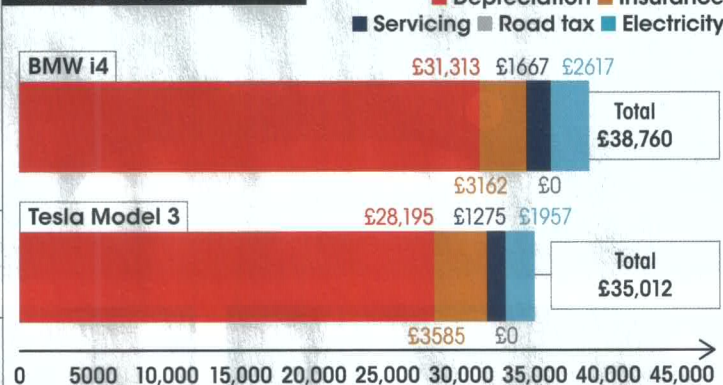
For 40% tax payers, until April 2022, 2023, 2024

Monthly cost £21, £43, £43 £20, £40, £40

## RESALE VALUE BY YEAR



## THREE-YEAR COST



compared with the 10 that can be swallowed by the Model 3 – nine in the rear boot and one in the front.

## BUYING AND OWNING

Costs, equipment, reliability, safety and security

Not only does the Model 3 cost around £4000 less to buy than the i4, but once you factor in its slower predicted depreciation and cheaper servicing costs, it will cost private buyers around £3000 less to own over three years.

However, if you take the PCP route (as many will), the tables are turned. On a three-year deal with a £6000 deposit and a limit of 10,000 miles a year, the i4 is a touch cheaper at £963 a month, versus £977 for the Model 3.

And there's barely anything between the two for company car drivers. Between now and April

2024, a 40% taxpayer will have to sacrifice £1085 of their salary to run the i4, compared with £1019 for the Model 3.

Both cars come with generous servings of luxury kit as standard, such as 20in alloy wheels, heated front seats, premium sound systems, LED headlights and electric bootlids. It's a shame that desirable features such as keyless entry and adjustable lumbar support are reserved for the options list on the i4, though; the Model 3 gets these as standard. It also gives you access to Tesla's proprietary Supercharger network, which is arguably the car's greatest selling point; the network is more

prolific and reliable than any other and came top in our recent survey of the UK's public charging infrastructure.

With a maximum charging speed of 250kW, the Model 3 can be topped up from 10-80% at a Supercharger in as little as 25 minutes. The i4, meanwhile, takes around 30 minutes at its maximum charging rate of 200kW, but it might be a challenge to find a public CCS charger capable of delivering power at that rate unless you're lucky or plan your journey carefully.

In terms of safety kit, both cars get automatic emergency braking, but the i4 requires that

you pay an extra £1900 for BMW Technology Plus Pack if you want adaptive cruise control, traffic sign recognition and a steering assistance system to help you stay in lane. All this comes as standard on the Model 3, and you can take things even further with the contentiously named 'Enhance Autopilot' package (£3400). This enables automatic motorway lane changes and allows the car to be 'summoned' (rolling out of parking spaces to meet you, for instance) via Tesla's phone app although it doesn't make the car fully autonomous.

The i4 hasn't yet been tested for safety by Euro NCAP, but we suspect it'll perform very well; it's closely related to the 3 Series saloon, which scored a full five-rating. The Model 3, meanwhile, has been tested and generally scored very highly.

**'The Model 3 costs a lot less to buy and should hold its value better'**

## STATS AND SPECS

BMW i4  
M50Tesla Model 3  
Performance

## KEY FACTS

Engine	Two electric motors
Peak power	536bhp
Peak torque	586lb ft
Gearbox	1-spd automatic
Kerb weight	2290kg
Tyre size (std)	255/35R19 (f), 285/30 R19 (r)

Engine	Two electric motors
Peak power	563bhp (est)
Peak torque	487lb ft (est)
Gearbox	1-spd automatic
Kerb weight	1919kg
Tyre size (std)	235/50 R20

## BATTERY AND CHARGING

Battery capacity total/usable	83.9kWh/80.7kWh
Rapid charging type	CCS
Maximum charging rate	200kW

Battery capacity total/usable	82.0kWh/76.0kWh
Rapid charging type	CCS
Maximum charging rate	250kW

## CHARGING TIMES

7kW home wallbox (0-100%)	13hr
Rapid charger, peak rate (10-80%)	31min

7kW home wallbox (0-100%)	12hr 15min
Rapid charger, peak rate (10-80%)	25min

## RANGE AND EFFICIENCY

Real-world range (est)	185 miles
Official range	315 miles
Efficiency on test	2.3 miles/kWh

Real-world range (est)	233 miles
Official range	340 miles
Efficiency	3.1 miles/kWh

## SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating  
Not tested

Euro NCAP rating (2019)  
All protection 96% 86% 74% 94%

## PERFORMANCE



## Acceleration

30-70mph in kickdown 3.1sec

30-50mph in kickdown 1.3sec

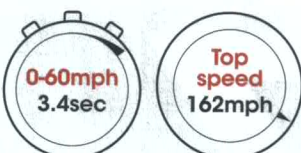
50-70mph in kickdown 1.8sec

## Braking

30-0mph 9.6m 70-0mph 52.5m

## Noise

At 30mph 58.5dB At 70mph 63.6dB



## Acceleration

30-70mph in kickdown 2.8sec

30-50mph in kickdown 1.1sec

50-70mph in kickdown 1.7sec

## Braking

30-0mph 9.8m 70-0mph 53.9m

## Noise

At 30mph 59.2dB At 70mph 66.0dB

Location Millbrook Proving Ground Weather conditions Cold and wet

## CARS PICTURED

BMW i4 M50 with Dravit Grey metallic paint (£1100), Technology Plus Pack (£1900), Visibility Pack (£1500), 20in M double-spoke bicolour alloys (£1350), Comfort Pack (£1200), electric glass sunroof (£1050), M Sport front seats (£890) and carbonfibre interior trim (£500)

Tesla Model 3 Performance with Red Multi-Coat metallic paint (£2100), Enhanced Autopilot (£3400) and Black and White vegan interior (£1100)

## WHATCAR? SAYS

The i4 is an impressive machine. It's fast, comfortable, extremely hushed at higher speeds and features a plush interior with a great infotainment system. So, why doesn't it win this test? Well, judged as a performance car, it doesn't quite have the grip, poise or balance to challenge the Model 3. For a car with an M badge on its rump, that's rather disappointing.

And that's particularly the case when its most direct rival is quicker, better equipped, more practical and cheaper to buy outright. Factor in its superior range, combined with Tesla's world-beating charging infrastructure and the Model 3 remains the most compelling electric car you can buy today.



But this car at [whatcar.com/new-car-deals](https://www.whatcar.com/new-car-deals)

## Tesla Model 3



For Ultra-quick; impressive capable handling; spacious and practical; Tesla's unrivalled Supercharger network

Against Lumpier ride on broken roads; more wind noise; poorer fit and finish; less sporty driving position

## Recommended options

None



But this car at [whatcar.com/new-car-deals](https://www.whatcar.com/new-car-deals)

## BMW i4



For Stonking pace; comfy ride; high-quality interior; great infotainment system

Against More expensive as a cash buy; heavier – and feels it; limited rear head room; less luggage space

## Recommended options

Front adjustable lumbar support (£195)

## EQUIPMENT

✓ Standard ✗ Not available

	Adaptive cruise control	Adaptive suspension	Heated/electric front seats	Leather upholstery	Heat pump	Adjustable lumbar support	Keyless entry/start	Heated steering wheel	Panoramic glass roof	Parking sensors front/rear	Rear-view camera	Metallic paint
BMW i4	£1900*	✓	✓/✓	✓	✓	£195	£1200**/✓	£220	£1050***	✓/✓	✓	✓
Tesla Model 3	✓	✗	✓/✓	✓	✓	✗	£1100	✓	✓	✓/✓	✓	£1100

\*Part of Technology Plus Pack \*\*Part of Comfort Pack \*\*\*Electric glass sunroof