

2023 BMW X1 (U11) Review

I traded in the X1 after less than a year, buying a 2024 BMW M240i.
This is a bit of an exit review of the X1, input for future updates/versions.

Delivery:

Original build ordered with Seattle BMW in August '23. Arrived in December '23.
Instead I purchased my X1 at BMW Salem in December '23.

The original BMW Seattle ordered X1 arrived very obviously damaged. Half a dozen people had to have noticed in the week they had the car, prepping before delivery. Zero chance it wasn't noticed, but no one said/did anything. I had to first find out about the damage entering the delivery bay. The damage was at eye level on the driver's side, so again it was incredibly obvious. I noticed it the second I entered the delivery bay. Unbelievably Seattle BMW expected to go ahead with delivery, which I naturally shut down.

The damage would require replacing the driver's side back window, and possibly more. The parts would need to come from Germany, might be 6 months, and naturally run the risk of permanent issues (seal, wind noise.) Particularly since it would undoubtedly be the first time someone would be doing this particular replacement on the new generation. All reasons I was absolutely not taking delivery of a damaged car.

Fortunately to avoid another 3-4 month wait I found another X1 with all my exact build options (plus a couple minor additions) on the lot at BMW Salem, a dealer that happens to be owned by the same group as BMW Seattle. But when Seattle continued to disappoint at every turn, I flew down to Salem and bought it instead of waiting for incompetent Seattle to respond, and get it transferred from Salem.



X1 Review

Exterior Design:

- Overall, very well done.
- The F48 was a good design, but certainly not a great one.
- With the U11, there may be no single drastically different design element, but the many evolutionary ones add up to a much better-looking vehicle. More refined, mature, and modern. An exterior design that will age well.
- Though I will say the choice between X-Line and M Sport (M Performance not available at the time) was an easy one for me. The X-Line elements look sharp, while the design differences of the M Sport to me detract from that. They do not look well thought out, with simply oversized front and rear elements, including the awful additional acre of cheap black plastic on the rear. Lazy looking design changes that look out of place, particularly with just M Sport, not an M Performance variant.

Colors:

- Thank you for having multiple color choices beyond Black, White, and Silver.
- The San Remo Green (which I had) was excellent.
- My original order was Utah Orange, which was also good. (Both my MINIs were green, so I went with the Orange on the first attempt with BMW Seattle.)
- For a future model year, a dark red/maroon would be a great addition.

Wheels:

- I had the 19" 867 wheels, which I wasn't 100% sure about when I had only seen pictures. But when I saw them in a video, and then in person, I was very pleased.
- This was important since I didn't want the 20" wheels because of decreased ride quality, more easily damaged, etc., and the fact that the default 18" wheels are truly embarrassing to look at. Those 866 plastic wheels are one design element that is inexcusably bad and should have never made production.

Packaging:

- For reference, the basics of my build was:
 - San Remo Green, X-Line, 19" 867 wheels.
 - Mocha Sport Seats, Eucalyptus Trim.
 - Premium Package, Heated Seats (I realize packages have changed since my order.)
- A positive with the X1 vs. other vehicles I was considering was your option packaging. Packages, particularly expensive ones where it's a bit of all or nothing with certain options can make or break a purchase decision.
- I understand that some packaging has to do with streamlining of manufacturing. But it seems other option/package decisions are little more than regional marketing choices. (This has certainly been the case with MINI to their detriment.) Bundling unrelated options together can drive people away when it results in large price increases with unwanted options.
- The big key was obviously the \$4200 Premium Package. In my case, I wanted essentially all the included options, which is a relief of sorts.
- Often model packaging results in needing to overspend to get the features you want, or detract because the only way to get X is to forgo Y.
- You certainly have some of that with the feature/color/wheel exclusivity with X-Line vs. M Sport. But fortunately, I did not want/need the M Sport specific options, and neither of my color choices were M Sport specific.
- One exception would be is while I was happy with the Mocha seats, BMW should offer the Alcantara seats as a universal option. (I have the JCW Alcantara seats in my MINI, and also had Volvo's version of Alcantara in my XC40.) With BMW apparently wanting to go more leather-free, Alcantara should be an option on all models/trims alongside the Sensatec/Veganza.



Interior (non-technology) Design:

- Overall, well done.
- Thank you for the minimal use (after optioning to Eucalyptus trim) of always cheap looking, dust/scratch/fingerprint magnet high gloss plastic. I realize plastics keep costs down, but where plastics are utilized, I 100% prefer a traditional matte black plastic no matter the car. Shiny black plastic does not make cars look “premium” as apparently too many people in the auto industry want to force customers to believe.
- Mocha seats and Eucalyptus trim – Which like everything with the car I had only seen in pictures/videos before ordering, were both great, completely pleased with.
- Sensatec dashboard – Also great. I have the JCW leather dash in my MINI (2013 Coupe S) and am very fond of a non-plastic dash.
- Ambient Lighting – Leaving aside the Drive Mode color lock with Sport and Efficiency mentioned later, the Ambient Lighting was excellent. Sharp, bright, but never distracting. Some color choices were disappointing ... why pinkish “Coral” instead of true Red for example? Emerald Green was perfect for my Mocha/Eucalyptus interior.

Center Console:

- I like the floating console in principle, and the height/position works well. But the under-console space is largely wasted. Exposed (to potential thieves) and not easy to use with anything but small items. Items that may fit fine once in position, but because of the seat bolsters are awkward to get in/out. A future version would be better off closing off the back half, with a traditional deeper storage console below the arm-rest portion instead of the very shallow one.

- Mobile phone holder was a very well done design, with the charging/vents, bar to hold it in place. And I particularly liked the option (which I had an iDrive shortcut for) to turn the charging on/off, so you could have the phone there in the perfect position without the charging when not needed. Something I was disappointed to find out that my M240i does not have.

Gear Selector:

- This was an initial concern but has turned out to be completely fine.
- The bulbous shifter of previous BMW interiors always looked bad to me, and the design/use of the buttons on the top/side of the shifter were also awkward/bad.
- My Volvo XC40's gear selector required double-taps that I hated as much on day one as on the last day I had it. It looked good, but functionality was atrocious. You had to pay what should be unnecessary attention to make sure you were in R or D as intended.
- Thankfully the new BMW one, while aesthetically not to everyone's liking, functions frustration free.
- One suggestion/improvement would be to have the gear selector have a little more heft. Make it metal or wood instead of plastic to have this regular touch point be more substantial, a more premium feel.

My Modes:

- These are less *My Modes*, and more *Your Modes*. Modes seemingly decided upon by BMW Marketing for their preferences, not that of their paying customers.
- Very disappointed with the lack of configurability, particularly around Auto Stop/Start, and lack of "Individual" modes. How is it that *any* 2023 BMW is less drive mode configurable than my 2020 Volvo XC40 was?
- Also absurd, and where these are particularly not *My Modes*, is that when changing to Sport or Efficient Mode, the Ambient Lighting changes and can't be overridden. A cosmetic thing, but a particularly insulting thing seeing how unnecessarily ridiculous it is (being 100% marketing, not a cost issue.) Change to Efficient mode for example, Ambient Lighting changes to the light blue that I am not fond of. Can't change it back to my default of Green that actually goes with my interior. Similarly, Sport mode changes to not even a true red, but pinkish "Coral" and can't be changed.

Auto Stop/Start:

- The worst of any car I've ever driven. I travel a lot for work, so in addition to my own cars, I drive a wide variety of rental cars with Auto Stop/Start each year.
- The core, unconfigurable issue is that it turns off the car after 1/10th of a second, instead of a couple seconds.
- The result is 90% of the instances of it shutting off the engine are extremely brief and undoubtedly a net negative in fuel consumption and wear and tear on the engine.
- A common example is simply when navigating in/out a large parking lot, where you have natural brief pauses with other cars. But if Auto Stop/Start is enabled the car might shut off 9 times in the span of 45 seconds. And none of those 9 times would be where the car is stationary for more than a couple seconds. More often, just stopped for less than a second. Endless frustration with this design, where you are not saving one drop of fuel, more likely costing fuel with all the restarts, in addition to the general frustration of the constant restarts.
- In circumstances where you are pulling out into traffic, it becomes an actual safety issue not just frustration when the car turns off after a split second when no reasonable person would think or want it to. Where that hesitation/distraction and restart might contribute to getting T-boned when needing to pull out into oncoming traffic.
- Making this all the worse is the lack of a physical button to enable/disable makes it the worst designed feature of the car. Voice Control (because someone really wanted this to be a completely horrible design) is not available to Enable/Disable Auto Stop/Start.
- I of course added the "Disable Once" as a shortcut where you have to awkwardly swipe down to Enable/Disable, but having to do that constantly makes you hate the car every time you drive.
- I'm aware of Sport Mode disabling it. But that gets back to the lack of configurability of My Modes where you can't have the balance of Auto Stop/Start disabled without the high idling/fuel wasting of Sport Mode when you just want to disable the poorly executed Auto Stop/Start.
- To be clear, I want the Auto Stop/Start feature. I use it regularly in my M240i, where it has the Auto Stop/Start button and can disable it in Eco and Comfort. But it needs to be designed for the circumstance where it's actually beneficial ... stop lights, where you will be stationary for more than a few seconds.

iDrive 8:

- There is no bigger design choice failure with the U11 than the lack of an iDrive controller. And if BMW deletes it from all models as seems to be the future direction, my M240i will be my last BMW.
- I will note that I am not remotely anti-touchscreen. I have (in a different industry) designed and programmed touchscreen interfaces for almost 25 years. So not anti-touchscreen, but anti-bad touchscreen UI design. Particularly in cars, where bad execution quickly becomes a distraction/safety issue.
- With the X1, I of course knew from pictures/videos before ordering that the Controller would be gone. But what I did not anticipate is how bad iDrive 8 and the lack of configurability in the U11 would be, making the absence of the iDrive Controller and all the awkward swiping not tolerable.
- An excuse/alternative is typically Voice Control. But while BMW voice control is better than Volvo, that just means BMW is a 2 out of 10 compared to Volvo's 1 out of 10.
- Voice control as a primary interface is *NEVER* the correct answer. Voice control is largely a failure ridden gimmick, not a replacement for physical buttons or competent UI design.
- I would use Voice Control sparingly in the first place. But for one feature I wanted it for (since this is buried in iDrive) is turning on/off the AC. The command "Turn on AC" or "Turn off Air Conditioning" fails *every single time* on both the X1 and the M240i. iDrive understands the sentence, because (after the long delay of course) it repeats it back. But the result is either nothing (doesn't turn the AC off or on) or it turns off all of climate control. Not the feature actually named/labeled AC. Complete failure ridden gimmick, not a replacement for physical buttons.
- App icons with the heavy use of Teal make them look very 80s/90s, in a bad way.
- For both the X1 and M240i, another missing configuration option is to turn off iDrive/music, etc., when the car is turned off. Instead of the current requirement to have to long press the volume button or open the door.

Deep Sleep:

- A great function to have, to reduce battery drain. Particularly for me, where I work from home when not traveling, so I do not drive a ton. Disappointed my M240i does not have the feature.

Harman/Kardon:

- The “upgraded” Harman/Kardon system was disappointingly poor. My 2013 MINI also has the OEM Harman/Kardon, and is noticeably superior to the version in the decade newer X1. I don’t know how this is the case except misguided cost cutting.
- Harman/Kardon’s website shows that it was not my imagination, as it lists the MINI Coupe with 480 watts, while the X1 is less than half the power at 205 watts.
- <https://www.harmankardon.com/mini-coupe.html>
- <https://www.harmankardon.com/bmw.html>
- My M240i Harman/Kardon is better at 360 watts, but still noticeably less power/clarity/bass than my 10 year old MINI.
- While I don’t recall specifically about my MINI build, I imagine the upgrade price from base to Harman/Kardon was comparable. So this significant quality drop in decade newer cars is simply inexcusable.

Apple CarPlay / iPod Compatibility:

- With CarPlay connectivity being wireless only, that naturally contributes to slightly lesser quality music compared to wired.
- But while you claim iDrive is iPod compatible (so I could use wired for better quality) my iPod that works in other cars does not work in either the X1 or M240i.
- It recognizes the iPod when plugged in, but the iDrive error message is “USB device not supported.”
- I have also tried music via a USB Drive for better audio quality, but that is very hit and miss, as you do not document format requirements, particularly for Playlists.

Navigation:

- The Video Augmented Reality technology (as I believe is BMW's name for the camera integration with the navigation) was excellent. Disappointed that it's not in my M240i.
- But Navigation needs the option to always stay in night mode as my 2013 MINI does, and I believe iDrive 7 did as well. The larger the screen, the more this is needed as the *very* white map detracts from a premium cabin.

Cup Holders:

- Oddity that the US/CA models have "adaptive" cup holders, while pics/videos of European models do not.
- I certainly prefer what we have, just a very odd difference that European owners/reviewers regularly point out.

Steering Wheel:

- With any left-hand drive car, Volume/Track controls should always be on the left of the steering wheel. (As it was with both my MINIs.) Moving the far less used Cruise Control switches to the right side.
- With Volume/Track on the right, you have 3 ways to change the Volume/Track with your right hand. None with your left.
- Having them on the right of the steering wheel is therefore redundant. On the left makes them complementary. It is more important with a manual transmission (like both my MINIs) where your right hand is more occupied, but it still should be the standard.

Wiper Stalk:

- Minor improvement in design would be to change the different wiper activations to like MINI has/had it (at as it was least my generation.)
- With MINI, you activate the auto-sensing wiper by pushing a button at the end of the stalk. While the one-time "flick wipe" (as your manual terms it) is the down press of the stalk. This is a very good design, in that you can have that often needed extra "flick wipe" without turning off the on-going wiper for that extra flick.
- With both the X1 and the M240i, that "flick wipe" is the down press, so you are turning off the auto-wiper in the process, so then need to turn it back on.

My BMW App:

- Missing a feature that I would think should have been in draft 1 of version 1 of any vehicle app ... time sensitive notifications.
- The Volvo app (with my 2020 XC40) would alert you if you had left the car unlocked for (I think) 20 minutes.
- BMW needs to add this for car unlocked and sunroof and/or windows left open. And be configurable for the number of minutes.

Conclusion:

I liked much about the X1, but the fact that I moved on from it in less than a year at quite a loss (neither of which I've never come close to doing before) has these takeaways:

- What Product Managers might see as minor ... if those items are constant annoyances, it can quickly lead to the buyer having moments of hatred of the car every day.
- In that case, it starts to not matter how great other "major" design elements are.
- Exterior Design: Great
- Interior (non-technology) Design: Great
- While those help overcome the other design decisions ... no iDrive Controller, awful iDrive 8 UI, Auto Stop/Start, and lack of common configurability ... that only lasts for a short time, and soon the constant annoyances add up and overtake the positives.

I'm sure BMW Designers/Marketing spends quite some time talking about ... *how does the car make you feel, the emotion factor.* (You certainly ask about it in surveys.) And what they probably don't cover is when your BMW can make you as the buyer feel stupid. *How is it that I bought this car with these inexcusable design flaws?*

I did give BMW another chance with the M240i, and I am generally happy with it. These are obviously two very different cars. But with their common functions, the constant annoyances of the X1 are mostly rectified with an iDrive Controller, Auto Stop/Start button than works in Comfort and Eco Drive Modes, and configurable "Individual" Drive Modes.