

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## [After 100,000 km, this E46 BMW M3 SMG owner wouldn't change a thing](#)

### Lead

The automated manual SMG gearbox is one of the most notorious talking points about the E46 BMW M3. For this latest edition of The Classic Drivers, we spoke to longtime owner Lukasz Gasperowicz, who says you shouldn't listen to the critics.



**Lukasz, thank you for chatting with us about your immaculate BMW M3. Firstly, have you been a life-long car fanatic or is it a recent obsession?**

"Life-long car fanatic pretty much sums me up as a person. Cars have always been a dominant part of my life and overshadow all the other hobbies. When I was a small kid, my grandfather planted the seed and my interest and involvement in cars grew exponentially. First there was my fascination with the automotive design. After that came the long-awaited pleasure of driving and finally the appreciation for the technical aspects of cars and wrenching on them. Nevertheless, cars remained only a hobby and have never been connected to my career. They are my escape from daily stress."





**BMW have made some amazing M cars over the years, what drew you to the E46 M3 in particular?**

“For as long as I can remember, I always gravitated towards the BMW brand. I can’t tell now whether it was the characteristic styling and sound of the vintage BMW cars, or the consequence of reading tons of magazines and catalogues which hyped up those rear wheel-driven performance vehicles. Over twenty years ago, I consciously chose an E30 for my first car and remained loyal to the brand up to this day. E36 Coupe, E36 Convertible, E38, E60 and E61 – I owned and loved all of those cars, but always wanted something special from the M-Division. I started driving cars in the early 2000s when the symbolic ultimate driving machines were represented mainly by the E39 M5 and the E46 M3. I watched and read excessive amount of promotional materials about those two cars and they became a default choice for my hypothetical future garage. I may say the M3 was my dream car.”



**Tell us about your specific car - how did you find it and how long have you owned it?**

“After selling my adored 7 series I was looking for an E39 M5. The market for those limousines at the time hadn’t gone crazy yet, but I was struggling to find a car in a good condition. The E46 M3 prices, on the other hand, already started climbing and it was very hard to find something within my budget, but after about six months of daily online searching I was able to find one near to my location. It’s a 2002 M3, originally delivered to Switzerland, and came to Poland in 2013. I managed to track the car’s history and bought it in 2016. It was (as usual) a mix of luck and coincidence that helped me find my car. I have now owned it for almost decade and don’t want to sell. I’m also still friends with the previous owner.”



**Your car is equipped with the infamous SMG gearbox. Some love it and some avoid it, but what’s it like to live with?**

“If you understand how it works and don’t expect it to behave like an automatic, it is perfectly suitable for daily driving. It can be smooth if used skilfully, but it can also scare the hell out of the passengers, trying to break their neck while changing gears. However, the other drivetrain components need to be in perfect condition for the gearbox to work at its best. Just don’t use the automatic mode, it does indeed suck. Back in the day, the SMG was an innovation, a step towards modern quick transmissions. Nowadays, the SMG is a completely unnecessary device, a gimmick, but it contributes a lot to the M3’s character and I’m not thinking about swapping it to a manual. After upgrading the electric pump motor and the fluid, the SMG has proven to be bulletproof.”





**The E46 M3 really is a fantastic grand tourer - have you taken your car on any exciting road trips?**

"Long road trips became the most important part of my M3 ownership. I always loved to travel by car, but it was the M3 that sparked the need for grand touring. I was subconsciously waiting for the proper car to do it in. There was that first trip to the Garda Lake in 2017, which quickly escalated and me and my better half ended up visiting the Stelvio Pass, Venice, Milan, Monaco, Nice and Cannes. Instead of being a one-off 4,000 km adventure, it started as a series of, usually spontaneously organised, trips to the most beautiful places in Poland, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, France, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Monaco. Although being used as a daily car, most of its mileage has been made during our euro trips. Exploring new picturesque places with your own beloved car is an other level of personal freedom. It is extremely addictive."



**It sounds like you're really getting the most out of it! You became a father during your ownership of the M3. Did that change your relationship with the car?**

"After our son was born, there was only one trip to Italy when we took the bigger and more comfortable 5 series. Traveling with the baby went flawlessly, so the following summer I put a roof box on the M3 and took the family again to our favourite spot: the sunny Cote d'Azur. Road tripping an older, analogue and in many ways flawed car is a truly special experience which makes me feel alive. The cherry on top is taking the M3 for spirited drives on Swiss and Italian mountain passes, it's like reaching petrolhead nirvana."





**Wow, you must have done some serious mileage! How reliable has the car been during your ownership?**

"The odometer shows over 250,000 km. I alone contributed almost 100,000 km. The car isn't babied and shows some signs of patina, but surprisingly it is still one of the most reliable BMWs I've ever had. Of course there was the famous cracked subframe which I have taken care of, and there's the famous rod bearings, which I now have to change for the second time. Those crucial points, together with the Vanos issues, have to be addressed sooner or later but belong to the standard M3 maintenance procedure. The only real problems I had with the car were one broken ignition coil, a clutch release bearing and a dead fuel pump. The latter failure was all my fault, although that might be Stockholm Syndrome kicking in. I have to admit, I usually try to change the parts before they break."



**That's a sound approach with any car, especially a modern classic like yours. What advice would you give to other prospective E46 M3 owners out there?**

"Mileage is only a number. You shouldn't be scared of high mileage cars. The most important thing is a well documented service history. Similar to the watch market, buy the seller and not the car. It is refreshing to see how many shops specialise in working on these cars and usually there are no problems with getting OEM or aftermarket parts. If you're going to inspect an E46, take somebody who knows these cars with you."

**Lastly, what's your ultimate driving song for your ultimate driving machine?**

"It has to be the Sultans of Swing by Dire Straits. An all-time classic."

*Photos by Maxim Konyshov, Michal Zelazowski, Luke Thiessen, Lukasz Gasperowicz*

**Gallery**



































































