

AUTOMOTIVE

## ASA gives BMW ad green light after distracted driving complaint

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*BMW 5 series. Image credit: BMW*

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By STAFF REPORTS

German automaker BMW has been accused of promoting irresponsible driving in a television commercial aired on March 8 in the United Kingdom.

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In the commercial, a driver is shown in a BMW 5 Series driving through the countryside before entering city limits. While driving, the man swipes his hand across the built-in infotainment screen located next to the vehicle's dashboard as the narrator says, "Introducing the new BMW 5 Series. Ambition raised."

Eyes on the road

The investigation against BMW was brought forth by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), an independent regulator of U.K. media.

The ASA believes that the commercial is "irresponsible, because it condoned or encouraged dangerous or irresponsible driving behavior prejudicial to safety and in breach of the legal requirements of the Highway Code."

BMW UK disagrees with the ASA's complaint because the driver is shown glancing quickly in the direction of the built-in screen and swiping his finger across it before returning focus to the road. The sliding motion is said to have taken less than one second.

In the time it took the driver to complete the action, he maintained full control of the car, and returned his hands to the proper position on the wheel, his gaze fixed on the road.



*The infotainment screen is located next to BMW 5 Series' dashboard. Image credit: BMW*

BMW feels the TV ad's driver was not distracted. The automaker's opinion was backed up by saying that most dashboard features, such as radio and air conditioning, need to be controlled manually, similar to that of the infotainment screen.

Clearcast, the U.K.'s ad clearance agency that gives commercials the go-ahead prior to broadcast, made points similar to BMW.

It is Clearcast's opinion that the in-car technology shown in the commercial requires less involvement than traditional dashboard features such as adjusting the vehicle's temperature. The agency also emphasized that placing a hands-free call while driving is more involved than briefly interacting with a touchscreen.

The ASA sided with BMW, ruling that the ad was not irresponsible.

Last July, BMW had to make slight changes to its High Beam Assist advertisements following a legal ruling.

In that case, the ASA ruled that a radio ad for the 1 Series with High Beam Assist made a misleading and unverifiable claim. Advertisers walk a fine line between sharing enticing information and exaggerating to a falsehood, however slight ([see story](#)).