

AUTOMOTIVE

BMW told to clear up environmental claims by ASA

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The electric BMW i3. Image credit: BMW

By STAFF REPORTS

A sponsored social post from automaker BMW UK has been banned by Britain's Advertising Standards Authority for misleading claims about zero emissions.

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The Facebook advertisement for BMW's i3 was investigated by the ASA after a consumer issued a complaint to the marketing watchdog. Following its look into the brand's effort, the ASA found it in breach of the Committee of Advertising Practice's codes on substantiation and environmental claims.

Statement substantiation

BMW's post was seen on May 29. The statement investigated came from a customer, who said in a testimonial, "Having driven petrol guzzling cars before, I realized that it is now time to switch to an electric car. With zero emissions, the i3 really is a clean car and helps to give back to the environment."

The ASA looked into whether this claim could be substantiated. In response to the complaint, BMW said that the car is a battery electric vehicle, which includes the option of a gasoline-powered engine that solely charged the battery as a "range extender."

BMW also noted that it would normally qualify a zero emissions claim by saying that it referred to driving. However, this was an unscripted and unedited driver statement, and BMW argued that in the context of the full ad, the owner makes the comparison between her old gasoline-powered car and the i3.

Since driving the car produces no emissions, BMW also said that it would be able to market the car as "green," which it believes is equivalent to a claim of "clean." According to BMW, the customer's statement about giving back to the environment should also be taken as a reference to the trading in of a gas-powered car for a greener one, rather than the car's inherent benefit to nature.



The BMW i3 is a fully electric model. Image credit: BMW

While the ASA did note BMW's position about the claims pertaining solely to driving, it ruled that the ad was not clear enough.

In addition to barring the ad from appearing again in its current form, the ASA said, "We told BMW to ensure that in future they made clear their environmental claims related to the all-electric vehicles only and not to make environmental claims about their products unless they held sufficient substantiation."

This ruling comes as German prosecutors look into claims made against BMW by environmental lobbying group Deutsche Umwelthilfe. According to [Reuters](#), the group alleges that BMW's 3-Series 320d has software that allows it to cheat on emissions tests.

In response to the preliminary inquiry, a BMW spokesperson told Reuters it "remained convinced that the vehicle in question complied with all emission requirements."

Volkswagen Group faced a scandal in 2015, as it was found to be cheating on emissions tests ([see story](#)).

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