

AUTOMOTIVE

BMW looks to “redefine automotive luxury” with new X7

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The new X7 will go on sale in spring 2019. Image credit: BMW

By SARAH RAMIREZ

German automaker BMW is hoping to make more inroads in the booming luxury SUV market with its newest addition to the X lineup.

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Premium marques are turning to new electric vehicles and, as in BMW's case, more sophisticated sports utility vehicles to attract affluent drivers at a time when car ownership is becoming less of a given. To introduce the X7, BMW released an imaginative, non-narrative short film that portrays the SUV as a luxurious escape.

"BMW is still trading on its reputation as a driver's vehicle, though that edge has faded in recent years," said David Undercoffler, editor in chief of [Autolist](#), San Francisco. "They likely hope to gain some attention from buyers looking for a little thrill baked into their luxury crossover that perhaps they feel the more conservative models from Mercedes and Audi don't offer."

Mr. Undercoffer is not affiliated with BMW, but agreed to comment as an industry expert. [BMW](#) was reached for comment.

New edition

BMW's visual introduction to the X7 in an indulgent look at the vehicle's bold presence.

With lingering exterior and interior shots, the X7 is driven through a variety of landscapes, from the oceanside to the mountains. The film also includes seemingly irrelevant scenes, such as a man peeling off his leather jacket while walking on a wooden dock, a woman using a vintage camera and retro footage of another woman on a diving board.

BMW's launch film for the new X7

The X7 is the largest vehicle in the series and has three rows of seating. It also features an electrically-operated panoramic glass roof to add to the feeling of spaciousness.

Drivers who place a premium on audio quality can opt for a Harman Kardon surround sound system with 16

speakers or a Bowers & Wilkins Diamond Surround Sound System with 20 speakers and 1,500-watt amplifier, instead of the standard system with 10 speakers.

The SUV also includes the updated BMW Cockpit, which will also be found in the new BMW X5, BMW 8 Series, BMW Z4 and BMW 3 Series. In-car technology and connectivity are increasingly becoming draws for car shoppers.

BMW is improving connectivity between drivers and their vehicles by introducing an Intelligent Personal Assistant as part of its revamped cockpit. The iDrive Controller was introduced back in 2001, but this is one of the most significant updates for the system.

The new user interface has display customization options, including combining 2D and 3D graphics with animation. By providing relevant information, the system will keep the driver's focus on the driving situation at hand ([see story](#)).



BMW's X7. Image credit: BMW

New car models are an important way for automakers to draw in drivers as ridesharing and subscription models become more more popular. BMW is one of many luxury auto companies that have gotten into the ridesharing field opened by Uber.

BMW's ReachNow has instituted a major app redesign, allowing customers to borrow a car and drive themselves or order a car to come pick them up to navigate the city. ([see story](#)).

"[BMW] will seek buyers on the younger side of the luxury spectrum who are sophisticated and moderately adventurous," Mr. Undercoffler said. "Notice there aren't any kids in the debut video. This is likely done with the understanding that if you position the vehicle as a sexy lifestyle choice, wealthy buyers with kids will naturally gravitate towards it anyway."

SUVs excel

Sales of sport utility vehicles have dominated the luxury car market in 2018, but the gap between high-end and mass-market SUVs is narrowing.

More than 1 million luxury vehicles have sold this year, 62 percent of which were SUVs, according to a report from Edmunds. Growing availability of high-end SUVs has driven this trend, but the price gap between luxury and mainstream vehicles has also shrunk 10 percent in the last decade.

Traditionally, luxury automakers have differentiated themselves from mass-market brands with better performance and styling. With SUVs, however, handling and horsepower are of lesser importance, which lowers the premium added to the high-end options ([see story](#)).

BMW has two of Europe's top-selling premium SUVs, with its X1 and X5 models. However, demand for its 3-series dropped 21 percent in the first half of 2018 ([see story](#)).

"This new X7 will undoubtedly grab many buyers from the BMW family who have an X5 and want something bigger, or who left the BMW family already because they wanted something bigger and are coming back now that the X7 is offered," Mr. Undercoffler said.

"Overall when viewed purely as a product there is very little that is truly unique to the X7," he said. "It's a six- or seven-passenger large crossover with similar features, amenities and powertrains as its peers."

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