

The Ultimate Driving Machine! For those of us who love the look, ride and feel of BMW's 7-series, but are not willing to pony up the \$75,000 to \$100,000 plus it takes to buy a new one, why not consider the purchase of a previously owned "E38 seven series"? This month's **Technically Speaking** will overview the pros and cons of these wonderful luxury cars.

E38 seven series cars were produced from 1994-2001. They are commonly known as 740i, 740iL and 750iL. Although many options changed, and many improvements were made, the cars basically look the same. This body style is still very current looking. As a matter of fact, many people still believe the E38 740iL/740i is a better looking car than the current

E65/66 745Li/745i body style. While we are on the subject of body style, please note that BMW made both the "i", and "iL" versions of these cars. The 740i is very roomy on the inside, easy to park and well proportioned. The 740iL is close to six inches longer than the standard 740i. The additional space is all in the rear seat area. The rear doors and rear windows are noticeably longer. There seems to be no end to room in the back seats of these cars. Overall they have a great look and still seem to be easy to park. On the highway they are a dream. If you drive long distances, this is the car. Around town, they have plenty of get up and go. BMW also produced a 750iL. This car had the V12 engine and a number of other upgrades. One of my favorites is double thick side window glass. Yes, these cars are quiet. You won't see many 750s, they were very expensive. I have seen a few 750s that were purchased very reasonably, because people are scared of the V12 engine. Actually, these engines have been very reliable. They are however, more expensive to maintain.



From a mechanical perspective, the first two years of production had the early M-60 V8s. These were the engines that were famous for engine block problems. It is probably good advice to avoid these cars unless they have had the engine block replaced. A BMW service specialist can verify by casting number, whether the block is made of the updated Alusil material or if it has the dreaded Nikasil engine block. These early engines were also a smaller, less powerful 4.0 liter, which was subsequently upgraded to 4.4 liters in 1996.

Now that you are ready to run out and purchase the first 740i/iL you can find, lets slow down for a moment. First, remember before you purchase; have the car inspected by a qualified BMW specialist. The difference between two good-looking shiny cars can be significant if one car hasn't had an owner who properly maintained it. Secondly, before the idea of purchasing a pre-owned BMW that originally cost \$70,000 for the current market value of, let's say the low \$20,000 range, (or even lower) starts to sound too good to be true, we need to discuss maintenance philosophy. Just because a car cost a small fortune new doesn't mean it won't need maintenance or repairs. Actually, it is the other way around....expensive cars generally need expensive maintenance and repairs. BMWs are no different. If you do not have the tolerance for spending on vehicle maintenance (and an occasional repair), then consider leasing a new vehicle. However, if you can purchase the car and still have the tolerance and the budget for maintaining it, I guarantee you will love driving the BMW 740i or iL. Now everybody reading is going to askhow big is the maintenance budget? Well, that depends. This is where you need to be working with a BMW specialist that knows the cars in general and has looked at the specific car you are considering purchasing. BMW dealers also offer a Certified Pre-Owned plan, where the car will have some degree of warranty. With most things in life, you get what you pay for. CPO cars will often have a higher price, but could be better covered in the case of problems.

The remainder of the article will briefly outline some typical maintenance/repair items you could expect if you were driving a BMW 740i/iL. It is not meant to scare anyone, just to provide a realistic overview. Remember, items listed will vary based on model year.

From a routine maintenance perspective, plan on having oil services every 3-5000 miles. This is cheap insurance on a car you are expecting to drive into the higher mileage range. Depending on oil type (synthetic/non-synthetic) expect to spend \$60-\$100. This is a good opportunity for your BMW service specialist to check the car for any incidental maintenance required. Belts, brake fluid, coolant, brakes, light bulbs, etc., can all be easily checked. Inspection II services on a 740 will generally be over \$600. Cabin filters for these cars are \$54.00 each and they take two.

Suspension parts also wear over time. With our Michigan winters and potholes it seems like we see a high number of cars that wear suspension parts. In the front end, control arms, sway bar links, and strut inserts seem to suffer. The rear suspension has upper control arms and lower joints that wear over time. A seven series with 70-80,000 miles will typically have at least lower joints that need replacing. You could expect to spend about \$175-\$200 per side.

Cooling systems continue to be an Achilles heal for BMWs. The good news is the BMW list price on a radiator for a 740 is under \$200. Brakes are also a maintenance item, which you can expect to need on any vehicle driven to higher mileages. Front brake pads, rotors and a sensor will be in the \$500-\$600 range.

As you can see, the status of items listed above could greatly impact your immediate cash outlay for maintenance. In summary, the best rule to apply is have the car checked by a BMW specialist, and budget for maintenance/occasional repairs. Most importantly, enjoy driving one of the world's greatest luxury cars at a reasonable cost!

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