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a 605-horsepower engine, it was the M3 we were itching to get out of the car park. This is the car that carries the hopes of Brabham Racing, the rolling showroom of its not-inconsiderable skills. And as we were so close, there seemed just one logical place to take the beast: the Ronda Road. The Ronda Road is a daunting, twisting, 30-kilometer snake of tarmac linking Marbella with the mountain town that, with the right car, is like a near-equatorial Nürburgring, with a 1,000-foot drop replacing the Armco. It is Spain's Pikes Peak—with a real road surface the whole way up, and no chance of a radar trap. In short, it's a great place to drive cars.

Before we got there, though, there was the small matter of Marbella rush hour, and a chance to truly understand the visual impact of Brabham's alterations, which go way beyond a simple body kit. This is a place that has grown immune to Italian supercars, thanks to pure exposure; Ferraris languish like fat businessman in shorts on every street corner, and it takes something truly special to grab any attention. Much to my surprise, we do—because although it's clearly a special M3, I arrived thinking it didn't look so much different. It took the reaction of those around us to show how wrong I was.

They've thrown the whole body away and dressed the M3 in purest carbon fiber, which meant they could go nuts with the basic design. And though it's marginally over the top for the delicate English palate, this car will go down a storm in the less subtle U.S., Russian, Middle Eastern, and Far Eastern markets—the ones with money.

They'll love that lengthened front-end overhang, the fangs linked by that razor-sharp splitter, that power bulge that looks for all the world like it's housing a monster supercharger—but isn't—and those scary, flared wheel arches, rear lip spoiler, and monster carbon-fiber diffuser that surrounds the central exhaust tips.

Even the trunk lid is pure carbon fiber, with a neat visible strip outside the trim. That doesn't just have a cosmetic advantage; it strips 330 pounds from the curb weight of the car—and turns it into a 3,375-pound rocket sled.

Inside, it's a case of new badges, new leather, and a gorgeous Alcantara trim that covers all the cheap plastic fascia that was an unfortunate consequence of the M3's roots as the bog-standard 3 Series. That just isn't good enough for a car in this class.

The bodywork really is all carbon-fiber.

That Brabham badge caused some friction with the Brabham family.

Carbon-dressed wheels could become the Brabham's signature dish.