



Body-hugging seats, a flat-bottomed steering wheel and real carbonfibre inserts really lift the RS4's cabin



In comparison to the Audi's interior, the BMW feels drab, particularly the carbonfibre-look leather on the dash

'Where the RS4 scores most obviously over the M3 is via its greater sense of visual attitude'

drive and uses 255/40 18-inch Pirelli P-Zero tyres at all four corners. The M3 is rear drive and gets a very trick set of bespoke Michelin Sport tyres that measure 245/40 at the front and 265/40 at the back. As standard these are 18 inches in diameter, but for a little extra you can specify 19in wheels and tyres which, according to BMW's chassis people, do nothing whatsoever for the M3's dynamics. Inevitably, it's the 19s that most folks will go for in the UK, if the outgoing model is anything to go by.

On paper, then, they do appear to be astonishingly similar to one another. But the moment you line them up side by side in the metal, inevitably and immediately

the differences come flooding out. Like the fact that the RS4 has four doors instead of two and looks both more upright but also more muscular than the M3, despite the BMW's rather ludicrous power bulge and its glistening new chrome exhausts, of which there are four, two more than there are on the Audi.

Where the RS4 scores most obviously over the M3 is via its greater sense of visual attitude. It looks neat, compact and elegant, just as the M3 does, but at the same time the RS4 looks as if could tear your arm off at 20 paces, and that's not something the M3 ever quite captures. But then maybe BMW doesn't want the new M3 to appear so butch this time

round, in which case the Audi's greater visual aggression is not something Munich will greatly care about...

So, once you've noted the RS4's minor victory and realised, too, that it not only has the more practical bodysell (with an extra pair of doors but also the bigger of the two boots (460 litres versus 400)), you climb inside – at which point the M3 drives even further behind its arch rival.

True, the RS4's high-sided, hip-hugging Recaro seats do require a unusual level of gymnastics to vary across, but once you're ensconced make the M3's chairs seem plain unsupportive (which they're not, that's not entirely the point). Same thing goes for the rest of their respective cabins when you compare them pound for pound.

There's nothing wrong with the M3's interior as such, and in isolation its chrome-rimmed instruments and carbonfibre-look leather strip across the centre console certainly make it f