

BMW Z4 revealed, but launch date still camouflaged

The next-generation BMW Z4 roadster is real; BMW's pictures and videos of the test cars undergoing driving dynamics testing at BMW's Mirimas test center in France prove it.

Still up in the air is when a production version—uncamouflaged—will be presented, but that question may be answered this month at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance in Monterey, California.

BMW likes to reveal new and exciting things at Pebble Beach. Last year it was the Z4 Concept, so unveiling the actual Z4 this year would be a good follow-up. We'd say the odds are probably very, very good.

But even if production starts in November—as has been rumored—we probably won't see the new roadster in dealer showrooms before 2019.

The design of the new Z4—factory designation G29—is evolutionary rather than revolutionary. In fact, perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of the new sports car is that it will not have a hard convertible top like the last Z4, but a soft top—actually employing some hard elements—like sporty roadsters of yore.

BMW says that the top-of-the-line Z4 will be the Z4 M40i featuring “a new, extremely powerful inline six-cylinder engine.” That's probably a confirmation that BMW M will not be developing a full-on M version of the new Z4—at least for now.

The Z4 M40i is also described as having a lowered suspension, electronically controlled dampers, a new front axle, an M Sport brake system, an electronically controlled locking rear differential, and M light-alloy wheels with mixed size tires. That sounds like a quick and fine-handling sports car to us. In its press release announcing the Mirimas tests, BMW briefly mentioned the presence of an M Adaptive suspension, so there may be a significant amount of M technology going into the new sports car. By the way, BMW M also regularly tests at Mirimas.

“The vehicle concept of the new BMW Z4 is geared consistently towards agility and driving dynamics,” explained Jos van As, head of BMW Application Suspension. “The high level of body stiffness



and the very rigid suspension attachment provide the perfect basis for a setup that guarantees the performance qualities of a genuine sports car in terms of steering precision as well as longitudinal and transverse acceleration.”

In addition to fine-tuning the suspension, these tests at Mirimas were intended to optimize the car's acceleration, steering, and brake response—all very

important characteristics to the diehard BMW roadster driver.

Despite the huge sales numbers of BMW X vehicles and the declining popularity of the convertible sports car, it's refreshing to see BMW putting so much effort and money into what may be a niche car—especially when it's one that embodies the BMW principles of excellent performance and great handling.

The new Z4 will be Magna-fied

Although Magna previously hinted that it would build the next BMW Z4 roadster, the automotive parts giant and surrogate car manufacturer made it official in June with the announcement that it had received a contract from BMW to do just that: The new Z4 will be built at Magna Steyr's plant in Graz, Austria.

The Z4 will be the culmination of a joint project between BMW and Toyota to develop not only the next BMW sports car, but also the next Toyota sport coupe that will probably resurrect the Supra badge for the Japanese company. Although the recent announcement by Magna did not mention Toyota, industry speculation is that both the Z4 and the next Supra will be built in the same factory. Given that the two cars will share some components, this is not an unreasonable assumption.

BMW is no longer keeping the Z4 a secret, having released photos of the new roadster testing in France and rendering most private spy shots moot.

The new Z4 will not be the first BMW model built by Magna. Before it became a staple at BMW Plant Spartanburg, the early BMW X3 was manufactured by Magna. Then, last year, Magna began building 5 Series sedans. Magna also builds vehicles for Jaguar and Mercedes-Benz. “Our expertise in complete vehicle engineering and production makes us unique and the ideal partner for the industry,” says Günther Apfalter, president of Magna Europe and Magna Steyr in a statement reported by Top-Speed.com. “We are very pleased that we can further strengthen our relationship with the BMW Group and continue to solidify our overall position in the industry with a new business like this.”