



**2018 BMW 530e**

**Base Price:** \$66,900  
**Price as Tested:** \$82,750  
**Engine Type:** 2.0 litre 4-cylinder twin turbo  
**Power:** (engine and battery combined) 248 hp  
**Torque:** 310 lb.-ft.  
**Fuel Consumption**  
**City:** 10.5 L/100 km  
**Highway:** 7.4 L/100 km  
**What's Best:** whisper quiet, engaging technology  
**What's Worst:** If you don't have a driveway or a garage, charging is a challenge  
**What's Interesting:** BMW is developing a wireless charging mat to charge the 530e

# A dignified ride

Riding in BMW's new 530e plug-in hybrid is a journey into sensory deprivation. It is quiet as a cave. Though the range to drive it on pure electric power is about 25 to 30 kilometres, when the gas engine takes over, it is still quiet as an electric vehicle.



Kathy Renwald

So, combine the serenity of a sound booth with a glamorous interior and an oily-smooth ride, and you have the stylishly sedate 530e.

With the addition of the electric motor adding its 111 horsepower to the gas engine's output, my best average was 7.6 litres per 100 kilometres driven. That's impressive for a mid-size sedan.

BMW has committed to the electric future by promising to deliver 25 per cent of its lineup partially or fully powered by electricity by 2025.

The 2018 530e xDrive I tested starts at \$66,900. Optional equipment, including the \$6,500 Premium Package Enhanced, brought my test vehicle up to \$82,750, but the Ontario government incentive program offers a generous \$8,400 rebate on the 530e.

You don't have to love technology to bond with the 530e, but it does deepen your appreciation for its copious interactive features.

I spent a lot of time parked in the driver's seat pawing through menus, or watching the clever animations of features such as pedestrian detection.

Of course, BMW tries to keep the key functions streamlined. Management of the electric motor is controlled through the eDrive button. Choices are Auto eDrive, Max eDrive and Battery Control. The default is Auto eDrive, which chooses the best combination of the electric motor and gas engine for all situations. I used this setting for most driving. On any long trip, the battery was depleted by the return home, so most owners can expect to be charging the battery daily. On house power of 120 volts expect charging to take seven hours. On a fast charger using 240 V, the charging time is less than three hours.

The fuel economy of the 530e would excel on short urban commutes to work, coupled with a daily battery charge.

Another important decision the driver makes is choosing between Sport, Comfort or Eco Pro settings with the Driving Dynamics Control button. In all settings, the ride of the 530e is exceptional. The worst roads make no intrusion on ride comfort; it skims over all blemishes. A passenger could probably paint their nails without a mishap.

Sport mode is the most fun, as the steering – often described as numb – tightens up, and handling becomes perky, though the 530e can't be described as a thrilling drive.

The combo of electric motor and gas engine produces 248 horsepower with 310 lb.-ft. of torque. It's fast as needed but not blistering. The eight-speed Steptronic transmission married to the four-cylinder twin-turbo engine shifts seamlessly and, as mentioned before, the switch from battery power to gas engine is nearly imperceptible.

Braking is fine without any of the quirky feel of early electric vehicles and hybrids, even as it works to regenerate power to charge the battery.

The serenity of the cabin cannot be challenged, and the detailed workmanship on the interior is of artisan quality. With a white leather interior on my test vehicle and a textured wood trim, the surroundings were luxury-condo glamorous.

In front of the driver, virtual instruments are vivid and beautifully designed. There is a wealth of information on display, much of it relating to energy consumption and your driving habits. While it's intriguing, the challenge is to ignore the display before it becomes distracting. The heads-up display is a technological wonder, but it sometimes displays too much information, with graphics that look like you're about to land an Airbus at Pearson Airport.

Safety aids are abundant, but can be configured individually. The systems that approach a state of semi-autonomous driving are good, but my recollection is that similar systems on the equivalent Mercedes-Benz are a tad smoother in execution.

On the dash, an iPad-like screen is home base for digital services. Before you leave the driveway, you can get a weather forecast, check your calendar, ask Wiki Local where the nearest art gallery is, search Spotify for favourite tunes, and customize climate, safety and performance settings. It's like the heartbeat of the 530e.

So, what about people in the back seat? We took our neighbours to the airport. They're tall and had to do a bit of adjusting to get planted in the back but, once there, the seats are lovely and separate climate controls are a bonus.

The trunk loses space from the placement of the battery under the rear seat, so our neighbours' one big suitcase and two carry-ons filled up the cargo allotment.

Looking at the 530e sitting on the street doesn't set the heart racing. Its style is dignified, not daring. 

*Kathy Renwald is an award-winning automotive writer, photographer and videographer.*

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