

STAFF PROFILE

WHO
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Contributor

WHAT
E36 328i Sport

MILEAGE
148,100

YEAR
1998

E36 upgrades

No-one likes a sloppy chassis. And although the one on this Sport was no way near that, it was due a suspension spring clean. Composure and control were lacking, the steering was anything but precise and it's been pulling to the left since I bought it. Just as crucial, the ride height is a bit of an under-tray-cracking, chassis-rail scraping inconvenience, so I've (begrudgingly) decided to exchange a few stance points for driveability.

The coilovers are being replaced by something a little more practical from H&R and Koni, but before that I wanted to sort out the bushes – the thinking being that the aforementioned changes will be better appreciated when working from a better, polyurethane (PU) base.

BMW's are well catered for when it comes to bush and mount manufacturers, but SuperFlex's offerings appealed in particular for a number of reasons. The base material for SuperFlex PU is of a higher specification (but consequently more expensive, and also harder to work with during manufacturing) than that of other makes. Hardness Grades have been calculated specifically with fast road-use in mind, with the appropriate grade (up to four different grades on some cars) used for each area, depending on the loads put through them. And the steel used is of the stainless rather than zinc-plated variety. The company also boast over 30-years' PU bush manufacturing experience, and there's a three-year guarantee on its products.

The range of SuperFlex products is as comprehensive as any, too, and after careful consideration I decided to go for... all of them. That meant the very nice people at SuperFlex sending me: front (£30.60) and rear (£15.60) anti-roll bar, mount-to-chassis kits (definitely worth measuring your ARB to be sure of getting the correct size), a front link-eye kit (£32.40), an offset rear front-arm kit (£83.40), a rear-trailing-arm lower kit (£78.00), and offset upper inner



Right: Unassuming to look at but the results are anything but modest.

Below: It's a DIY job, but it would definitely help if you have kit like this.

Below middle: Sport has offset rear front arm bushes as standard, so same again this time round.

Below right: Measure ARBs before ordering bushes, in case they're not the originals.



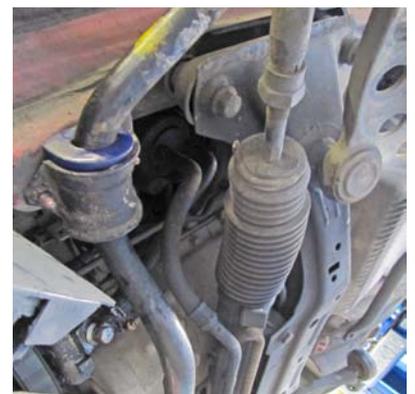
(£125.10) and lower inner (£90.40) rear-control-arm kits. Those prices might seem high compared to the cheapest offerings, but you spend the same amount of time or money fitting them, so you may as well spend a bit more on the initial purchase, particularly as it's likely you'll save money by not having to replace them again in the future.

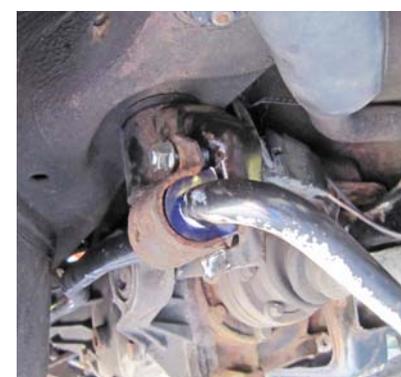
I would have given it a go myself but if I had I'd still be trying to take the ARB bushes out of the bag and you'd now be looking at a page of adverts. Better instead to give it to a company that knows what it's doing, like Regal Autosport. The Southampton-based tuner has dealt with things far more complicated than this (custom supercharger conversions and championship-winning chassis tuning, for instance), but it wasn't the work of

a moment even for these guys. The main consumption of time (apart from 148,000-miles of underside rust and ropey-ness) was the rear control arm bushes that required everything – diff, exhaust, heat shield – to be unbolted.

Regal quote eight hours (at £66 an hour inc. VAT) to change a full complement of bushes, including doing a pukka job of setting it up exactly how you want afterwards. At the moment the camber has been left alone, as it's not worth setting it until the new (higher) suspension has been fitted, and the tracking went unadjusted – let's just say new tie-rod assemblies will be fitted when it goes back for the new suspension. Yet, despite that, the results are hugely positive.

The change was instantly noticeable, from the moment the car drove over





the drop-down curb exiting Regal's car park. Not that they were entirely positive first impressions, because the result of a more rigid connection between body and suspension, and therefore more direct connection between car and road, does inevitably have its drawbacks. Background road-roar is now more noticeable and bumps transmit noisier thumps, whilst there's an unforgiving harshness over sharp bumps.

However if you're in the market for this kind of upgrade then you're not going to be too fussed about trade-offs like that, because the pay-off is a transformation, in terms of handling composure, body control and cornering precision. When the old bushes were prised off the car they looked to be in perfectly good order, yet the SuperFlex-equipped version of this car is improved

Above: This will have to be done again once the remaining suspension changes are made.

immensely. It tracks straighter and is far more stable at speed, turn-in is sharper and steering inputs are more obediently obeyed, and braking and sharp weight transfers are far better controlled.

What this means is that as well as being a more satisfying car to play silly buggers with, it's also a more relaxing one to drive at normal speeds, with motorway-munching particularly improved thanks to the new-found stability and composure. You find the steering wheel moves less in your hand and fewer steering corrections are required, and as a result driving is actually less tiring (added noises notwithstanding). And when it comes to roundabouts it's genuinely grin-inducing.

I'm sure I'll soon get used to it, but for now I'm enjoying the novelty of a precise

and secure, and as a result, confidence-inspiring, E36. And who knows, maybe the next round of suspension changes can take away some of the harshness. We'll see...

Below: Control arm bushes require plenty of shuffling about to get at.

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