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AC Schnitzer ACL2

Hitting the road in this stunning 570hp M4-engined lightweight



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Tackling the North Coast 500 in an M235i



Gloriously original Schnitzer 635CSi racer



LIGHT SPEED

AC Schnitzer's bonkers ACL2 Geneva show star has been on a serious diet and packs an enhanced M4 punch – it's an absolute belter

Words: Bob Harper Photography: Dave Smith







Wait for it, wait for it... I whiz past the derestriction sign on the Autobahn and can finally let Schnitzer's latest, and perhaps wildest, creation off the leash. There's torque in abundance from the tuned M4 motor but for maximum attack I really need to drop it down a cog or two to experience the full savagery of what this bespoke show car has to offer. At the same time as I grasp the stubby yet tactile gear knob the lumbering arctic that's chugging along in the nearside lane somehow decides that the headlights spearing through the morning gloom aren't moving that fast so he pulls out and indulges in some elephant racing with another truck for an absolute age.

The quicker lorry seems to be moving with the speed of cold treacle but after what seems like an eon its millimetric progress is completed and I can finally hit the loud pedal. And loud it certainly is. I'm in third gear and as I plant the throttle pedal firmly into the carpet the rear end hunkers down as the nose rises a smidgen and all the hounds of the

Baskervilles are unleashed somewhere back where the rear seats used to be and the ACL2 takes off like the proverbial bat out of hell.

In what seems like a nanosecond I'm reaching for fourth and then fifth as the ACL2 gobbles up the horizon like the best Sunday lunch it's ever experienced. The speedo needle seems to be heading round the dial at the same speed as the rev counter and our pace is only slowed again as another truck in the distance heaves its way into the outside lane to prevent further progress towards the ACL2's quoted top speed of 330km/h – 205mph.

The fact that the ACL2 is quick should really be a given – it has 570hp after all and has been on a pretty severe diet too – but what does surprise while I'm sitting at an enforced 100km/h behind the truck is quite how civilised it is. Yes, there is a pretty severe exhaust drone when sitting at a constant throttle at certain revs, but shifting up or down a cog soon gets rid of that. And then there's the ride quality – this might have Schnitzer's Clubsport suspension setup, but it's by no means overly harsh... a little jiggly in

places, but then this isn't a 7 Series is it? No, this machine was designed to go fast, and preferably fast away from the Autobahn so after one further acceleration fest we turn off in search of some better driving roads.

Naturally enough it's the photography that comes first though so once we've found a location that's to Smithy's liking we let him get busy with the cameras while I chat to the Schnitzer chaps and delve a little bit further into the technology underneath the ACL2. Schnitzer has a long tradition of making some pretty stunning show cars – the CLS (lightweight tuned E36 M3), the CLS II (ditto but based on the E36 Evo), the V8 Roadster (a Z3 complete with 4.4-litre V8), the Topster (an E39 M5-engined Z4)... there are plenty more in the company's archives but this year the company wanted to go all-out and produce a machine for Geneva that would put the new M2 in the shade and really stand out from the crowd.

No doubt life would have been very much easier for the company had it revealed the ACL2 a few months down the line as it could have used the M2





as the basis for its conversion, but if the car was to be ready for Geneva an M235i would have to be used as the donor car. The aim was to produce a car with plenty of power, but one which had also lost some of its excess fat too. One of AC Schnitzer's tuning mantras is 'less is more' so putting the M235i on a diet was a must and while tuning the M235i's 326hp was certainly possible it wasn't going to produce the results Schnitzer wanted for the car so an engine swap was on the cards, too.

Thus out went the N55 straight-six to be replaced

by the altogether rortier S55 from the M4, but even with 431hp the M4's lump needed some further fettling to reach the sort of power-to-weight ratio that Schnitzer craved. The intake system was optimised and clad in sexy carbon while a Schnitzer exhaust with sports cats and a certain amount of electronic jiggery pokery soon released the engine's potential to give 570hp at 6100rpm and a monstrous 546lb ft of torque at 3500rpm. Healthy gains I think you'll agree and when combined with the M235i's diet programme the ACL2 now has a better power-to-

weight ratio than an M4 GTS and a Porsche 911 GT3 RS. No surprise, then, that it'll knock off the 0-62mph sprint in 3.9 seconds and will accelerate from rest to 125mph in a blink-and-you'll-miss-it 10.9 seconds.

In order to ensure that all this power can be safely transmitted to the road Schnitzer elected to fit the front and rear axles from the M4 to the M235i and the wider track necessitated the fitment of the front and rear wheel arch extensions, along with the more aggressive front spoiler assembly and a gorgeous carbon rear diffuser. Schnitzer elected to paint the

The rear end hunkers down as the nose rises a smidgen and all the hounds of the Baskervilles are unleashed



whole car in what it describes as 'Classic Racing Green' and the colour's a nod back to the company's past as the CLS II was painted in a similar hue. In an ideal world it would have liked to have called the ACL2 the CLS III, but another German manufacturer now owns the rights to the CLS moniker...

Personally I'm not a huge fan of the rear wing – I must admit I don't like the BMW one on the M4 GTS either – aesthetically I'd much rather see a ducktail item à la M3 CSL, but given the speeds this Schnitzer machine is capable of I can see that you'd want to

ensure a decent amount of downforce at over 200mph. There are liberal doses of carbon littering the exterior of the car and there are some neat touches such as the new LED indicators housed under Schnitzer's new side gills. The bonnet itself is carbon fibre to reduce weight.

Externally there's no getting away from the lightweight forged AC1 alloy wheels with their bright orange/polished finish – I wasn't quite sure on the finish in the harsh light of the Geneva show halls, but now seeing them out in the open I think the colour

scheme actually works rather well. They are 10x20-inch all round and shod with 285/25 ZR20 Michelin Pilot Super Sports – only the best for Schnitzer's pocket rocket. Nestling behind the rims are a set of monster brakes – carbon ceramics measuring 400x38mm at the front and 380x28mm at the rear. If those measurements sound familiar that's because these discs are also donated by the M4, although Schnitzer has changed the yellow six- and four-pot callipers to black.

It wouldn't be a proper show car if the interior

AC Schnitzer ACL2

ENGINE: Replacement of the standard M235i engine with M4's S55 with AC Schnitzer performance upgrade, speed limiter removed by programming of the control unit, optimised carbon air intake

MAX POWER: 570hp @ 6100rpm

MAX TORQUE: 546lb ft (750Nm) @ 3500rpm

0-62MPH: 3.9 seconds

0-125MPH: 205mph (330km/h)

DRIVETRAIN: Six-speed manual gearbox, AC Schnitzer/Drexler limited-slip differential with 25-95 per cent locking

EXHAUST: AC Schnitzer downpipe, AC Schnitzer sports silencer system with special catalyst (200 cell), AC Schnitzer 'Racing Evo Carbon' tail trims

BRAKES: Front: six-piston callipers, carbon ceramic brake discs in 400x38mm diameter (perforated). Rear: four-piston callipers, carbon ceramic brake discs in 380x28mm diameter (perforated)

SUSPENSION: Exchange of the standard axles with M4 items, AC Schnitzer Clubsport suspension, height adjustable and adjustable in compression and rebound, M4 carbon strut brace

WHEEL SET: AC Schnitzer lightweight forged wheels in AC1 bicolour – red anodised/polished. Front & rear:

10x20-inch with 285/25 ZR 20 Michelin PSS tyres

AERODYNAMICS AC Schnitzer special paint – Classic Racing Green, AC Schnitzer carbon bonnet with bonnet vents (black), AC Schnitzer front skirt with carbon front spoiler elements, front splitter and carbon front side wings (two each side), AC Schnitzer special sports mirrors, AC Schnitzer carbon rear diffuser, AC Schnitzer carbon rear wing, AC Schnitzer front and rear wheel arch extensions (70 mm wider each side)

INTERIOR: AC Schnitzer bicolour leather interior: green and perforated Nappa leather in combination with black suede leather with green stitching, interior panels painted matt in Classic Racing Green, rear seats removed, AC Schnitzer carbon racing seats bicolour with black/green nappa leather and leather in carbon design with ACL2 emblems, AC Schnitzer three-spoke sports airbag steering wheel 'Evo' with Nappa and perforated leather and green suede, carbon door handles and center console, AC Schnitzer control display for oil temperature, intake air temperature and boost pressure etc, AC Schnitzer aluminium pedals, footrest, gear knob and handbrake handle

WEIGHT: 1450kg

PRICE: Concept only – not for sale



hadn't been upgraded and Schnitzer has really gone to town with the ACL2 – it's a wonderful place to spend wheel time. The heavy standard M235i seats have been dropped in favour of a pair of carbon-shelled racing buckets that have been exquisitely trimmed in green and black Nappa leather while the door trim panels have been clad in black suede with contrast green stitching. The dash highlights have been picked out in green as have the steering wheel inserts, and the actual wheel is a Schnitzer 'Evo' item.

One of the dash vents has been replaced by an Awron digital screen that displays all sorts of data from peak power and torque to temperatures to boost levels and so on. It doesn't do all that much when stationary which leads to all sorts of hilarity when I later ask Smithy to get a picture of it with some high outputs displayed. Apparently trying to point a Nikon with a big lens at a particular part of the dash while going for a full bore standing start isn't all that easy!

Elsewhere inside, the rear seats have been ditched and the remaining platform has been neatly carpeted,

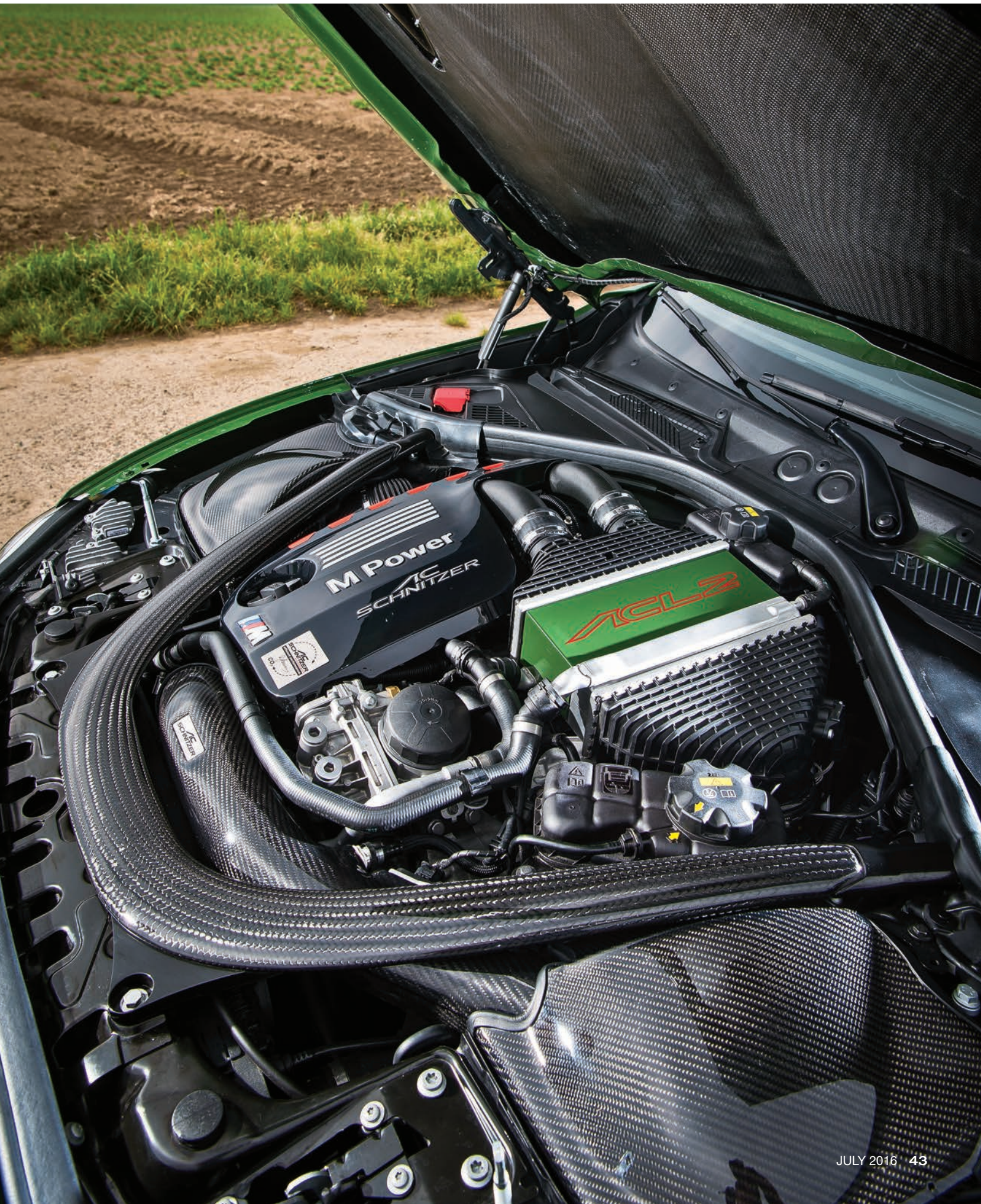
again in the interest of saving weight, and there are a few Schnitzer goodies around the cabin such as a pedal set, handbrake handle and aluminium 'Black Line' gear knob. The handbrake and gear lever gaiters are trimmed in the same suede as the door trim panels and the overall effect is pretty stunning. It does get a little warm though as the air conditioning has also been ditched in favour of saving weight.

Eventually Smithy's finished with the static pictures and I linger a last few moments drinking in the underbonnet detailing which is lovely, with beautifully finished carbon fibre and a smattering of green on top of the air intake. I gingerly close the bonnet, taking care of that one-off piece of carbon fibre and once again slip behind the wheel to find out how well this rocket ship performs away from the motorway.

Once the car-to-car photography is complete it's time for some serious action. Just starting the ACL2 for the first time really gets one's automotive juices flowing as the exhaust sounds seriously aggressive and at idle it's a bass-heavy rumble that would make your neighbours go off you very rapidly indeed. At

slower speeds it's relatively muted, but hit that Drive Performance Control switch into Sport mode and put the hammer down and all hell breaks loose. It sounds very, very angry – in a good way – and the harder you push the car the more spine-tingling the exhaust note becomes. It dominates proceedings, bellowing its approval as you run up and down through the gearbox, eliciting a veritable barrage of pops and bangs every time you change gear. It almost wouldn't matter if it turned out the ACL2 handled like a skateboard on an ice rink, such is the aural delight developed by Schnitzer's work.

Fortunately though there's more to this car than a very noisy set of quad pipes as the harder I push it the better the car responds. In the back of my mind is the fact that this is a very expensive one-off creation and while it would be easy to hide it in the green grass that's surrounding our chosen section of road I don't think Schnitzer's top brass would be too impressed. The roads are smooth and well-surfaced though and the corners are relatively well sighted and the ACL2 devours them with real verve. I'm pleased





for the tight-fitting bucket seats when I begin to tackle the corners with vigour. There's plenty of feel coming through my fingertips translating what's going on with the front wheels while the tight seat allows you to get a real idea of what the chassis is doing too. Given the monster rubber, the dry conditions and the Drexler limited-slip differential Schnitzer's fitted there are staggeringly high levels of grip on offer, but accelerating away from a standstill in a straight line demonstrates that the ACL2 will certainly break traction more or less whenever you want it to.

In deference to the one-off nature of this machine I'm not going to go all gung ho and attempt on the lock stops drifting for the camera, but with the traction control in its halfway house there's enough movement from the rear to get a feel for what a well-balanced and poised machine this really is. It might have a sledgehammer under the bonnet but there's a delicacy to its responses to small inputs that's most gratifying.

Then there's the fact that everything that's supposed to work, works properly. The M4 engine in

the car was originally mated to an M DCT 'box but for the ACL2 Schnitzer wanted to fit a manual as it weighs less than the DCT and also represents the ultimate driver's spec. Getting the new manual to talk to the various control units was a bit of nightmare but Schnitzer has done such a good job that even the blipping of the throttle on down changes works as seamlessly as it does in a standard M4.

If you stop driving like a loon it's also surprisingly easy to pilot the ACL2 along – the controls are perfectly weighted and the throttle response is exemplary, with minimal inputs offering the appropriate gentle acceleration. At the other end of the spectrum, large doses of throttle induce the sort of grin that becomes painful after a few minutes. As a way to have fun the ACL2 really can't have many, if any, peers.

All good things come to an end though and before too long it's time to head back to Schnitzer's Aachen HQ. Time for one last acceleration-fest as we blast past the lorries that thankfully stay in their correct lane and once again I'm blown away with the massive

levels of acceleration as well as the high-speed stability that's on offer. On the odd occasion that a slower machine does wander into my path those carbon ceramic stoppers wash off excess speed with alacrity and all the while that monster exhaust rises and falls in timbre, signalling its approval at giving it a proper work out.

The styling might not be to everyone's taste, but you really can't criticise the engineering integrity that's gone into this Schnitzer project car. As a light weight concept that goes like lightning it's the real deal. The only question that remains is how to persuade Schnitzer to build another one for my collection... ●

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