Words Paul Wager
Photography Paul Wager, Michael Whitestone

Alarming

E36 alarm giving you grief? Here's how to sort it out.

If you drive an E36 3-Series, you know all about the battery going flat every time you leave the car for more than five minutes. Chances are you've also found yourself locked out when the alarm remote has decided to fail.

You'll Need

Socket set
Screwdrivers

Unlike later models which have the alarm integrated into the car's electronic system, the E36 3-Series used a unit manufactured by Gemel in Italy — the firm behind the Serpi Star and Sigma brands.

The system goes by different names in different versions but one of the most popular is the 'BMW 3G EWS' — also known as the BMW Digital Alarm system. It works well enough until you damage the remote and you don't have a spare. Since these systems use a rolling code, you can't disable the alarm without the remote. You can't code the alarm unless you can deactivate it and so you're stuck.

Before you accidentally send your one remote through the washing machine and the system leaves you locked out, get down to BMW, buy a new remote control and follow our instructions to code it into your system.

Lost Your Instructions?

If your remote fails, you can deactivate the alarm with the 'secret code' which would have been provided when the alarm was fitted. Turn on the ignition, wait 30 seconds, turn it off again and count the flashes of the LED. If your code is '12345', wait for one flash and press the LED, then turn the ignition off and on again, wait for two flashes, turn the ignition off and on again and so on... until the alarm is deactivated.

Safety

The first rule of working on cars and using tools of any kind is don't take risks:

- If you're using power tools, protective gear is essential.
- Never work under a car without supporting it, using axle stands first.
- When cars catch fire, they burn fast. Always have a fire extinguisher to hand.
- If you're not completely confident in your ability to complete any task safely, don't even start it. Leave it to the experts.

The advice and guidelines given in *Total BMW* magazine are given in good faith and neither *Total BMW* nor A&S Publishing can take any responsibility for injuries sustained while carrying out the described tasks and procedures, or any consequences arising from them.

1 The alarm module should be fitted behind the glovebox, which means you'll need to remove it. We've been here before but in case you weren't paying attention, start by removing the two screws in the outer top corners of the dash vents.

2 Then prise out the plastic covers and remove the other two screws.

3 Two more screws are found at the bottom edge of the glovebox aperture and two more underneath. Prise out the glovebox light and remove the bolt hidden above it. With this out of the way, the whole glovebox frame can slide out.

4 With the glovebox out of the way you should be able to see the alarm control module. The receiver module can be unplugged from the main body of the unit which is why it's missing in this shot.

5 With the module easily accessible, you'll need to find the coding switch which can be accessed through a hole in the side of the casing. Make a note of which position this is in, as you'll need to move it to put the unit in coding mode. We've marked it in this shot so we know which way to flick it in future. Earlier versions of the alarm do not have this coding switch.

6 Before going any further, make sure you've bought the correct remote from BMW. Usually you'll be lucky and they'll even have them in stock, but take your original to the dealer to be sure of getting the right one. We bought part number 82 92 9 404 882 at £34.05.

7 With the coding switch flicked to the coding position and the car's ignition off, press the red button on each remote in turn to a maximum of four remotes. Flick the switch back from the coding position and try the remotes. If you've done everything right, they should both work and you can put everything back together.

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A Helping Hand

We show you how to make your phone and a Sony CD player talk to the Mini's multi-function steering wheel.

As we're sure you already know, new laws which came into force in December prohibit you from touching your mobile while you're on the move.

This presents most drivers with a problem — a full-on, fully integrated kit is a lot of expense and if you change the car or phone a few months down the line you face another big bill.

You'll Need

Crosshead screwdriver
Torx screwdriver

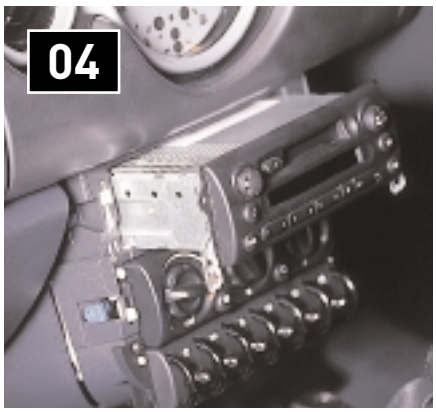
So what do you do if you want a hands-free kit in your Mini which works without you having to take your hands off the wheel and without having holes drilled everywhere?

Simple — Connects2 can link a standard hands-free kit to the display on a Sony stereo to display your phonebook and call details, all controlled by the buttons provided on the Mini's multi-function steering wheel.

Recently, Sony started supplying head units to Mini dealerships as an optional extra, so this is a relevant upgrade for many owners. It's a good idea to upgrade the head unit anyway, as the sound quality will be better with an aftermarket unit and the extra functions will give more flexibility with your music.

The system also mutes out whichever source (CD, radio etc) you're using at the time and puts the call through the speakers, returning to your music the minute you hang up. It activates the system if you've got the head unit switched off when a call is made.

While it's possible to use an HCA20 HF kit for Sony Ericsson phones, or even a CARK 120 for later pop-up Nokia phones with the Sony unit, our installation used the popular Nokia CARK91 kit in conjunction with a Sony Xplod CDX-CA680X head unit and Connects2's own 'box of tricks', which does all the translating for the electronics.



1 First job is to get the factory radio out. Start by removing the four screws at the top of the two silver upright struts.

2 The other ends of these silver struts are held in place by the base part of the console, which you'll need to loosen in order to allow some movement of the struts. Prise out the electric mirror switch, which is held in place by two metal clips at the front edge and you can access the two screws located below it.

3 The other two screws are in the bottom of the two cup holders at the front of the console. Remove these and the silver struts should now be loose enough to allow access to the two screws which hold the factory radio in place.

4 Remove the screws and slide the radio out, being careful not to scratch the console with the sharp edges of the metal casing. You'll find a white connector plugged into the back of it which you'll need to unplug.

5 Push the wiring loom for the Connects2 interface up through the passenger side of the centre console, plugging one end into the back of the Sony head unit and the other into the original radio connector. Then slide the new unit into place. Don't worry, the plugs are designed so that they only go together the correct way.

6 Because the Sony stereo is a standard DIN-sized unit, it's slightly smaller than the non-standard Mini factory radio, so we used a plastic adapter plate from Autoleads (available from Halfords and all good car audio dealers). The silver and black style of the Sony CDX-CA680X blends in well with the Mini console and the unit looks right at home in the car.

7 With the new unit installed, we mounted the Nokia phone cradle on the left-hand side of the centre console using a damage-free clip-on bracket from the Swedish-made Brodit Pro-Clip range (for more details visit www.nemesisgb.com). These sturdy brackets are simple to install without drilling any holes and can easily be removed when you change the car.

8 The microphone for the phone kit is best placed next to the clock housing in the roof. Remove the clock by simply squeezing either side of the plastic casing, easing it out with your fingernails. Feed the wire through the opening, clip the clock back into place and run the cable back to the Nokia control box. We fed it under the headlining and then behind the rubber door seal, which can simply be pulled away to allow access.

9 With the hands-free kit, the Connects2 interface and the new Sony stereo all plugged in, here it is — the finished article. Scroll through your names using the volume buttons on the back of the Mini's wheel, then make a call using the source button. There's absolutely no need to take your hands off the wheel at all during the whole process.