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BMW 3-Series (92-98) & Z3 (96-98) Haynes Online Manual

24 Airbag system - general information and precautions

1992 and 1993 3-Series models are equipped with a driver's airbag. On all 1994 and later 3-Series models and on all Z3 models, both a driver's and passenger airbag are standard equipment. Side impact airbags are installed in the front doors of some 1997 4-door 3-Series models and on all 1998 3-Series models. The airbag system comprises the airbag unit(s) (complete with gas generators), two impact sensors (1993 and earlier models) or one impact sensor (integral with the control unit - 1994 and later models), the control unit and a warning light in the instrument panel.

The airbag system is triggered in the event of a heavy frontal impact above a predetermined force, depending on the angle of impact. The airbag is inflated within milliseconds and forms a safety cushion between the driver and steering wheel and (if equipped) the passenger and dash. This prevents contact between the upper body and wheel/dash and therefore greatly reduces the risk of injury. The airbag then deflates almost immediately.

Every time the ignition is switched on, the airbag control unit performs a self-test. The self-test takes approximately 2 to 6 seconds and during this time the airbag warning light on the dash is illuminated. After the self-test has been completed the warning light should go out. If the warning light fails to come on, remains illuminated after the initial period or comes on at any time when the vehicle is being driven, there is a fault in the airbag system. Take the vehicle to a BMW dealer for examination at the earliest possible opportunity.

Disabling the airbag system

Warning:

Before working in the vicinity of any airbag system component, be sure to disable the airbag system as follows. Disconnect the negative and positive battery cables, and then wait 10 minutes for the airbag back-up power supply (a capacitor) to discharge before removing the airbag.

Warning:

Note that the airbag(s) must not be subjected to temperatures in excess of 90°C (194°F). When the airbag is removed, ensure that it is stored with the trim side facing up.

Warning:

Do not allow any solvents or cleaning agents to contact the airbag assemblies. They must be cleaned using only a damp cloth.

Warning:

The airbags and control unit are both sensitive to impact. If either is dropped or damaged they should be replaced.

Warning:

Disconnect the airbag control unit wiring plug prior to using arc-welding equipment on the vehicle.

Caution:

If the stereo in your vehicle is equipped with an anti-theft system, make sure you have the correct activation code before disconnecting the battery.

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