

E39 523i REVISIT

We transform the exterior of our E39 with some facelift rear lights and a Xenon kit to replace the factory candle lights...

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The M Sport front and rear bumpers were fitted when the E39 ran as a project in *TBMW*, but there were one or two stones left unturned, such as the early amber and red rear lights and the factory headlights.

The Sport bumpers made the shape of the E39 much more contemporary, as they look more aggressive and use oval fog lights, over the sharper edges of the early SE lights. It's subtle differences such as this that make all the difference to the overall appearance of the E39.

The initial plan was to repair the localised areas of damage on the bumpers and have them repainted in a fresh lick of Cosmos Black, but the budget was already mostly spent. So time was taken machine polishing them to make the best of what we had. A Cosmos Black paint stick was also used to give the stone chips some protection before the winter arrived.

Headlights

By the time we leave the office, just like everyone else on the nine 'til five, at this time of year it's pitch black and negotiating anywhere that's unlit by streetlight is the equivalent of having your eyes closed while using the standard factory E39 headlights. Main beam is the only way of properly seeing ahead, but you are constantly toggling the column stalk for oncoming traffic.

The later post-2001 angel eye headlights are an option and they do improve the front end of an E39, but they are expensive to buy used, and with our headlights having new lenses fitted just over two years ago, they were still mostly unmarked. For anyone looking to wet sand headlights, then refer to the June 2011 issue for a how-to guide.

The answer was a 6000k xenon conversion from our friends at M Style. It's a

retrofit kit that's designed to not to bring up any dashboard warnings, which consists of ballasts, ignitors, and the relevant wiring. It's important to buy the correct kit and not a generic xenon conversion online, which can be bought cheaply, but will flag up bulb warnings. M Style charge £132 including VAT for its conversion, and fitment is very straightforward.

Rear lights

Reverting back to amber from clear lights has been the flavour for some time now. Amber front indicators on a white E36 Coupé is an improvement over the aftermarket clear versions, but the balance of our E39 wasn't quite right at the rear. It had clear front indicators and side repeaters, but the rear lights were still 1998 fare, which are a mix of amber, red and clear. Yet despite everyone reverting back to amber, this era of E39 rear light is unlikely to make a comeback.

Not wanting to stray away from the OEM theme of this project, we bought a pair of red/clear lights from M Style, which give the look of the later 'Célis' versions and for less than £100 it's completely refreshed the back end.

Privacy glass

Cosmos Black is a tricky customer, because going for limo tint windows would make it look like a drug cartel's pool car, so something more opaque had to be picked from Tintsmart's catalogue to blunt the sinister element. Cahit of Tintsmart has tinted windows for various celebrities and is regularly called on by local manufacturers to tint the windows of new vehicles.

With the advent of the E60, the call for E39s isn't as high as it once was, so Cahit had to dig deep in his template archive to find 'old 5-Series'. Once again, the OEM Sport bumpers brought the E39 more up to date, but just like the SE door mouldings, the mild factory window tints sat in contrast to the rest of the car.

TO-DO LIST:

- * ~~Oil leak from cam cover~~
- * ~~Bootlid doesn't close (fixed)~~
- * ~~Full service~~
- * ~~M Sport front bumper cracked in places~~
- * ~~Fit leather seats and change walnut trim~~
- * ~~Replace odd M Parvaller wheels~~
- * ~~Paintwork heavily scratched/swirled~~
- * ~~Renew wing mirrors (smashed casings)~~
- * ~~Suspension upgrade~~

Part Four

Tintsmart only apply Suntek film, which is considered as one of the best. Unlike some films, this doesn't interfere with radio frequency and Tintsmart must have confidence in it by offering a lifetime warranty, albeit to the original purchaser. As you will see in our step-by-step stages, it can be shaped under heat, which is essential for the E39 saloon's huge rear window.

After discussing plans with Cahit, the 35 per cent 'Smoke' was rated as being the middle ground between the factory setup and 'Limousine' tint. Suntek films block out 99.9 per cent of UV rays, which is great for when the sun tries to make the interior into a furnace in the summer months, but they also prevent the glass from shattering in the event of an accident and it will be harder for thieves to gain access.

Cahit works at an incredibly fast pace, stating that a decent breakfast is what sets him up for the day. It's a skill that isn't picked up overnight but Cahit is obviously an old hand, making an incredibly neat job on the first attempt. On top of a mobile round, Tintsmart has also opened a premises in Basingstoke where customers can visit. Expect to pay around £250 Tintsmart to perform this job on an E39 saloon.

Contact

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Tintsmart

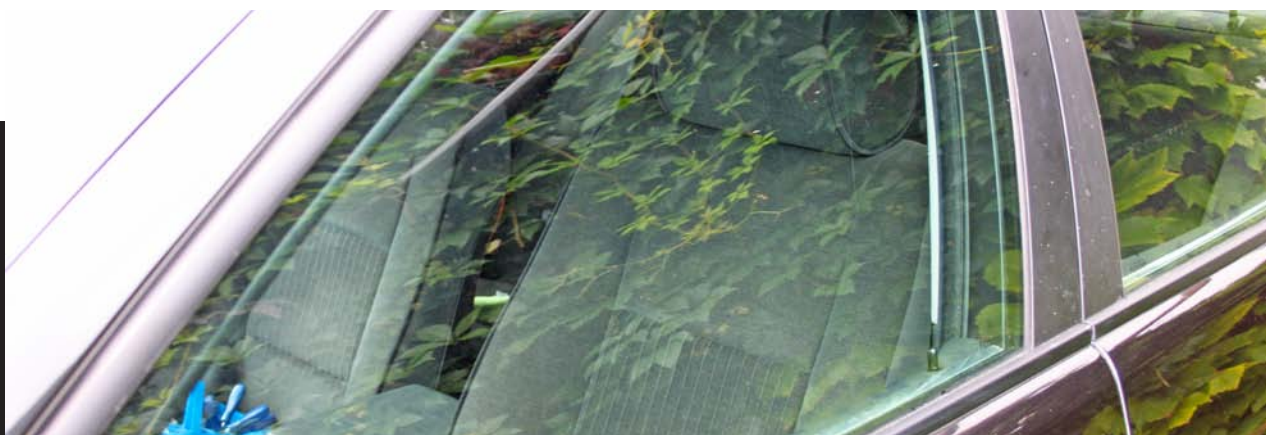
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Tintsmart: Step-by-Step

01

The factory tint suit models such as the E36, but the E39 carries off darker windows with ease.



02

Cahit ensures his templates fit the E39 and the 'Smoke' film roll is cut to suit each template.



03

This powder solution is sprinkled over the rear screen to allow the film to be moved on the glass.



Tintsmart: Step-by-Step (Cont.)

04

A heat gun is then applied to the film to allow it to mould to the curved shape of the screen.



05

Cahit uses a special solution and a cleaning pad to clean the inside of the screen, paying special attention to the heater elements.



06

Cahit lifts the film into the car single handed and uses a series of squeegees to drive the bubbles out.



07

The inner trim is removed on all four doors to ensure the film can be applied further down into the window.



08

Any excess is trimmed using a file. The film then becomes part of the window with no trace that it has even been applied. Cahit recommends the windows are left untouched for three days.



09

With the job completed, the smoke windows look fantastic. This level of tint is more stylish than sinister.



Rear Lights: Step-by-Step

01

The standard lights look dated now but for less than £100, the M Style versions will transform it.



02

The wiring harness can be unplugged if any bulbs need to be replaced. Silvatec bulbs will disguise the orange indicator bulbs in the clear section of the lamp.



03

The plastic bulb holder must be removed to gain access to the nuts that hold the cluster in place. Turn this plastic dial anti-clockwise.



04

With the lamp out, clean the metal surface as it would have picked up a lot of debris over the years.



05

There are four 8mm nuts that hold the lamp in place. A quarter-inch drive palm ratchet on an extension is ideal.



06

The changeover takes little time but it has done the job we set out to do. Bringing an early E39 into the 2000s...



Head Lights: Step-by-Step

01

The factory bulbs (side lights and dipped) produced a yellow light that wasn't effective when you really needed them.



02

The M Style ballast bolts into an existing hole on the offside inner wing and over an existing stud on the nearside inner wing, followed by a suitable nut.



03

This is the wiring harness required for the E39. It's a direct fit into the factory loom with no need for any splicing.



04

It's literally plug and play. Just match the factory connectors to the M Style loom.



05

Ensure the bulbs remain protected and you don't touch them. The bulb holders are the same as the factory versions, so fitment takes seconds.



06

With M Style LED sidelights in place to match the hue of the xenon 6000k headlights, the light conversion is now complete.

