



BMW X6 xDRIVE35i / MATTHEW RUDY

Coast roller

I suppose you *could* take an Amtrak train from New York City to Boston. You'd have a wide seat, no traffic to fight, the occasional coastline view—even a place to plug in your laptop. And they can tell you exactly what time you're going to pull into Back Bay station.

But efficiency isn't everything.

Escaping New York City's gravitational pull by car for a golf weekend on the New England coast is particularly satisfying: You get to pick the itinerary (and change it whenever you want), and there's a visceral enjoyment that comes from the right car.

For the itinerary, we chose a varied Interstate and local-road route up to Foxwoods Resort Casino in Ledyard, Conn., continuing along Long Island Sound to Newport, R.I. For the ride, we chose Sexy Frankenstein: BMW's new, hard-to-categorize X6.

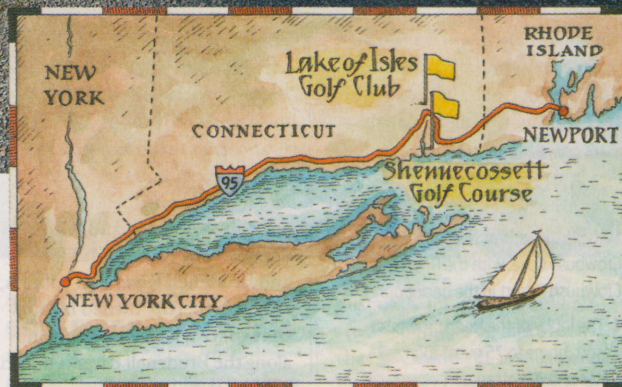
"Frankenstein" might be a *little* overstatement. Sloppy stitching, raggedy cloth and exposed bolts are nowhere to be found on BMW's \$52,500 "tall sedan." But the X6 really is a wild experiment: a mix of 5-series sedan size with X5 SUV height and a fastback hatch in

back to swallow golf clubs. If all that sounds like a tarted-up, top-heavy station wagon with really fancy seats, just wait until you jam the accelerator.

The real alchemy is in the hidden bits under the car. The engineers have basically programmed the engine and suspension to work together to make a 5,000-pound hauler behave like a 3-series coupe. Add in BMW's next-generation twin-turbo six-cylinder power plant, and you have a vaguely wagon-y thing that can melt its tires and get parked out in front at the Foxwoods valet, and that's where

ours was every night. "I don't know what that thing is, but I like it," said one 40-something woman on her way into a Sean (Diddy) Combs event at Foxwoods' new MGM Grand.

Diddy and golf are part of Foxwoods' master plan to expand its demographic reach beyond middle-age and retiree casual gamblers. The MGM tower, which opened last year, adds 825 Vegas-style rooms, complete with plasma televisions and marble double showers. And the roster of shows at the MGM's 4,000-seat theater is a little more fashion-forward:



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Diddy, Diana Krall and John Legend mixed with casino-circuit staples like Jerry Seinfeld and Penn & Teller. I paid \$240 for a weekend night for a brand-new room, compared with \$300 the next night at the faux-rustic (and slightly seedy) Two Trees Inn on the other side of the property.

The other "brand extension" is Lake of Isles, Foxwoods' foray into golf. Rees Jones designed 36 holes across the street from the resort: the private South Course and the public-access North. They're basically two scoops of

NOTES

- 1 At Abbott's in seaside Noank, Conn., lobsters come off the boat feet away.
- 2 From the tee, Foxwoods' Lake of Isles (★★★★½, \$195) often feels more "lake" than "isles."
- 3 The classic New England hot lobster roll at Abbott's—no mayo filler—with pickles, coleslaw and chips. Eat it on the dock, with the seagulls.

the same flavor, and that flavor is Damp. High-end resort golf is all about giving the one-and-done proles a memorable \$195 experience, and the North delivers, if pitilessly.

The 459-yard 18th hole is hard enough. It's 200 yards of carry over water off the tee, then 50 yards of salad and giant boulders between the end of the fairway and the granite green that repels shots with great prejudice.

For a break from pumped-in casino oxygen and gravity-defying forced carries, make the 15-minute drive south to seaside Groton to get a taste of what life was like before the mega-

casinos came to Connecticut. Shennecossett Golf Course (★★★★½, \$41) is all charm, wedged into the neighborhood that grew up around it. You even play your first tee shot over the traffic on Plant Street. A former private club designed by Donald Ross in 1916, Shenny was purchased by the town of Groton in 1967 and turned into a municipal course. It oozes history even before you reach the first tee. The mission-style clubhouse dates to 1914, and vintage club championship boards with names like Tommy Armour and Glenna Collett Vare line the shop walls. Three of the original Ross holes were lost to ensure uninterrupted Viagra production at the neighboring Pfizer plant, but the club received a seaside plot in a tradeout with the drug company, and the three new holes have commanding water views.

New England has many restaurants with a lobster-shack theme, but to get the real thing, drive a few miles east from Groton to Noank, where Abbott's sits on the dock just feet from where lobstermen bring in the catch. It's not fancy—the signature hot lobster rolls are served on cafeteria trays, and you eat on picnic tables—but it's a fine place to be at sunset, with a cooler of wine or cold beer.



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BMW X6

MSRP \$52,500 (\$72,520 tested)

SEATS/MPG 4/17.8

ENGINE 3-liter, 300-hp twin-turbo V6

OPTIONS Heads-up display (\$1,200), rear DVD (\$1,700), navigation (\$2,000), sound system (\$2,000), adaptive drive suspension (\$3,700) are a sampling.

THE GOOD Ridiculously fast, swank and composed trucklet.

THE BAD Pick up a nice 2005 3-series convertible for the price of the options.



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