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MINI John Cooper Works Convertible Road Test

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Author: David Miles

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The MINI John Cooper Works Convertible – All Posh and ‘Pecs’.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

A lot of convertibles can be more Show than Go but not the top of the range MINI John Cooper Works (JCW) Convertible. This version is indeed Posh and well equipped and of a high quality, but this one also boasts lots of ‘Pecs’ with its muscular styling and high powered 2.0 litre, 231 hp turbocharged petrol engine.

This is a potent race-bred top of the range version of MINI’s third generation (under the parentage of BMW) 2+2 seater, two door soft-top priced at £26,630 for the six speed manual version or £28,205 for the six speed Steptronic sport auto. But delve into the options pack and the price can go up to as much as £35k.

With lower powered Cooper, Cooper DS and Cooper S versions priced from £18,475 the UK remains the top selling global market for the MINI Convertible with close to 30,000 registrations between 2011 and 2015 for the outgoing range. All versions continue to be built at MINI’s Plant Oxford facility. For the first eight months of this year UK MINI sales of all models are up by almost 7% to over 38,500 units, making it the eighth best selling model range in the top ten sales chart.

The new Convertible is based upon the larger and latest generation MINI Hatch with two passenger doors, but in reality it remains a 2+2 four seater. However there is slightly more rear seat space than previous versions – but not much. Better news is the boot volume has been increased by 25% offering 215 litres (7.59 cu.ft) with the roof up and 160 litres (5.65 cu.ft) with it down. The improved insulated fabric roof can be electrically operated at speeds up to 18 mph and there is fully integrated rollover protection.



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The new Convertible has an overall length of 3,821 mm (12.54 ft) or 3,874mm (12.71 ft) for the Cooper S and JCW versions with their larger sports bumpers. All models are 1,727 mm (5.67 ft) wide, 1,415 mm (4.64 ft) high with a wheelbase of 2,495 mm (8.19 ft). Compared to the outgoing soft-top version there is 98 mm (3.86 in) extra length, 44 mm (1.73 in) extra



width and 1 mm (0.04 in) extra height. The wheelbase is 28 mm (1.10 in) longer and the track width has grown by 42 mm (1.65 in) at the front and 34 mm (1.34 in) at the rear.

The new two-door Convertible adopts the styling changes from the MINI three and five door Hatchbacks and the six door Clubman estate. There are the signature new generation larger headlights, a wide grille, rounded front wings and at the rear are recognisable large tail-lights. The front exterior for the JCW version has a bolder front bumper with larger air intakes and the rear bumper follows the same sports theme. The fabric roof has been upgraded in terms of better acoustic performance and heat insulation, plus smoother electric operation. It's still pram-like in design as it stretches from the upright windscreen right to the tail of the car where it folds into the top section of the boot. Rear and rear quarter visibility has not been improved with the roof up so thankfully it has rear parking sensors and a rear view camera.



The larger overall size of this latest generation of Mini allows for improved interior space and better – but not perfect – access for the two rear seat passengers and more headroom. Standard equipment includes electric windows, air-con, the 6.5-inch screen positioned in the



huge circular central display, MINI DAB radio, Bluetooth, MINI Connected, rear parking sensors and a reversing camera. The spec increases as you move up the ladder of variants and of course there is a wide range of options and option packs, all part of the well known MINI personalisation sales programme.

The JCW auto version I tested gets bespoke sports seats, black carbon fibre printed trim inserts and lots of plush leather trim, plus a JCW bespoke multi-function steering wheel and instruments, also JCW door sill covers. The MINI Driving Mode selector gives Eco, Mid and Sport modes; Eco being efficient but tardy really, dulling the acceleration and only recommended by me for use once cruising speeds have been reached. Even using it around town I felt the auto gearchanges too slow and ponderous. The Mid mode is really the best for most driving conditions before selecting Eco once cruising speeds are reached. Sports mode is self explanatory and ideal for track days, not likely with a convertible, but can be used more often when our congested UK roads are not quite so busy and you will enjoy the enhanced sound track from the twin tailpipes. The six-speed auto changes were fast and slick and it can be left in full auto or controlled by use of the gearshift paddles for more driver involvement.

The JCW Convertible is fitted with a sports suspension which is firm riding for sure but not too uncomfortable on better road surfaces. However there is added road noise intrusion from the sports 17-inch wheels and 205/45 tyres. Wind noise intrusion through the fabric roof was relatively low, and with the roof down the wind blustering into the interior with the windows up was modest thanks to the high waistline. The handling remains agile as we expect from any MINI, the steering needle-sharp and the four-piston calliper Brembo brakes powerful. With the lack of a rigid roof there was some body-flex, common with most convertibles, during cornering and when the car became unsettled over undulating road surfaces.



Core to the JCW Convertible's performance is the 2.0 litre, four cylinder direct injection petrol engine with variable camshaft control for the inlet and outlet valves. In common with other new generation BMW petrol units the turbocharger is integrated into the exhaust manifold to improve the engine warm-up time, thus lowering CO2 emissions and improving fuel consumption. Developing 231 hp this unit provides an additional 39 hp over the Cooper S version. Most importantly is the 320 Nm (236 lb.ft) of torque which is available from a very low 1,250 rpm right through to 4,800 rpm. This gives instant response and acceleration 'grunt' from very low engine speeds, with a wide power band, so for the majority of driving time, from traffic congested roads through to high speed cruising, there is always ample power as long as the Eco mode is not selected. Top speed for the automatic is 150 mph and



149 mph for the manual. The zero to 62 mph acceleration time is 6.5 seconds for the auto and 6.6 seconds for the manual.

When it comes to fuel economy the auto officially returns 43.5 mpg and the manual 47.9 mpg with CO2 emissions of 138 g/km and 152 g/km respectively. This means VED road tax is £130 auto and £185 for the manual. During my test driving the auto version returned an overall figure of 37.8 mpg for town and country driving, but with little opportunity to give it some severe treatment as the driving period coincided with the hoards of motorists on holiday.

VERDICT

So this is MINI's fastest ever Convertible but it comes at a price. On the right road and with the right traffic conditions it is enjoyable, but the advantages over the cheaper Cooper and Cooper S versions are hard to justify. Not only will you save money for marginally less performance, but their ride quality is better as well and the specification is still good. For the MINI enthusiast who wants that JCW performance and image the three door Hatch is a better choice and over £3k cheaper. For: High speed wind-in-the-hair fun driving, high quality well-equipped interior, sports exterior styling, strong and responsive engine, snappy fast auto gear changes. Against: Expensive, hard ride, limited rear/rear quarter visibility, compact rear seat/leg room, small boot.



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Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

MINI John Cooper Works Convertible 2.0-litre auto.

Price: £28,205 without options.

Engine: 2.0 litre, four cylinder direct injection turbocharged petrol, 231 hp, 320 Nm (236 lb.ft) of torque from 1,250 rpm

Transmission: Six speed Steptronic auto.

Performance:



0-62mph: 6.5 seconds.

Top speed: 150 mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 43.5 mpg (37.8 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 138 g/km, VED road tax £130, BIK company car tax 24%.

Insurance Group: 31E.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 3,874 mm (12.71 ft), W 1,727 mm (5.67 ft), H 1,415 mm (4.64 ft), boot 215 litres (7.59 cu.ft) roof up 160 litres (5.65 cu.ft) roof down, 2+2 seating/two doors.