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MINI – Recent updates, plus new Cooper S Convertible – First Impressions

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MINI's first changing modern world - Convertible Tried and Tested.
By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

The Mini brand when British owned, or MINI now under the control of Germany's BMW Group, celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2019. This year the Convertible celebrates its 25th anniversary. It first went on sale in 1993 as the Rover Mini Cabriolet.

Although now German owned Oxford Plant remains the British home of MINI although some models are built in other countries now to meet the global needs of 110 countries. A new



MINI rolls off the brand's production lines every 67-seconds and the first ever all-electric production MINI Hatch range will be built at the Oxford Plant and go on sale next year.

But for the here and now we have already received the updates for the latest generation MINI three and five door Hatchbacks and the Convertible outlined to the UK media at last week's multi-model press event. But such is the fast moving automotive world that even before I had finished writing my review about the updated models, news came in from BMW Group that the updates will now be included for MINI Countryman and Clubman models and all MINI petrol engines from July onwards will be fitted with particulate filters ahead of the future Euro 6d-TEMP emission standards.

All MINI and BMW models already comply with the WLTP Worldwide harmonised Light vehicle Test Procedure for real-world fuel economy and CO2 emissions which come into force from September for most new cars.

New technology with updated connectivity functions including MINI Connected Concierge services, wireless smartphone charging, standard-fit front and rear LED lights, anti-dazzle adaptive headlights with Matrix high beam as an option, various standard styling changes, a revised dual-clutch automatic gearbox option and an increased customisation programme are just some of the new features for the latest MINI models.

But there's still more for the less organised or forgetful owners. Another new 2018 option for models is MINI Find Mate. This option consists of tags with a Bluetooth tracking function that can be attached to frequently used objects and travel items such as bags, cases, key rings and rucksacks. Their position cannot only be displayed on the car's on-board computer

but also in your MINI Connected App on a smartphone, preventing personal items getting lost or left behind. It's just one of the attention to detail functions MINI offers its customers that keeps it ahead of the competition in terms of desirability in its 'supermini' sector - but of course it does all add up cost wise

At the recent MINI press launch Media Manager Chris Overall said UK sales this year will



be around the same number as last year, almost 70,000 units, the vast majority will be petrol powered models and there is increasing demand for the Countryman PHEV petrol/electric plug-in hybrid version.

Breaking down the sales figures he said around 44,000 annual UK sales go to the three and five door Hatch models with the three door versions slightly outselling the five door models. The Clubman estate range takes around 16% of sales, the Countryman SUV 11% and the Convertible 9%. The Convertible is celebrating its 25th sales anniversary this year and remains the UK's best selling soft-top.

Currently on the road prices see the MINI three door Hatch priced from £15,900, the five door Hatch from £16,600, the Convertible from £19,790, Clubman from £21,045 and the Countryman from £23,345.

As it's the 25th anniversary of the MINI Convertible that was the model I selected for my brief Cotswold test drive last week. To be exact it was the top spec Cooper S version costing £23,830 but actually costing lots more with the options being showcased.



In addition to the latest technology upgrades and styling tweaks, every MINI Convertible includes a fully-electric roof, front and rear LED lights, Rear Parking Distance Control, 6.5" colour infotainment screen, Intelligent emergency call (E-call), DAB digital radio, Bluetooth and more as standard.

The all petrol engine two-door line-up consists of the 1.5 litre Cooper 136 hp version, the 2. - litre Cooper s 192 hp and the 2.0 litre John Cooper Works 231 hp variant.

The Cooper S version is powered by a turbocharged 2.0 litre, four-cylinder petrol engine with 192 hp but more importantly 300 Nm (221 lb.ft) of torque available from just 1,350 rpm, which means it offers immediate low down 'grunt' for overtaking acceleration. More



relevant is the smoothness and flexibility driving along in a high gear at low speeds, enjoying the sunshine with the roof down. It is a very refined vehicle either pottering along or doing what MINIs have always done, providing a driving 'thrill' with its agile and surefooted handling when the mood takes you or the traffic conditions allow.

Perhaps it's not quite as agile as the MINI Hatch versions due to its extra weight partly incurred by the electronic roof raising and closing mechanism and the added strengthening in the bodyshell. With the roof down there isn't any evidence I could find of 'scuttle shake' which was usually evident due to a loss of torsional rigidity with soft-top cars of the past. The cornering stability remains go-kart like and the ride generally compliant even though my test car had the must-have and popular Chili options pack which includes 17-inch alloy wheels shod with firmer riding run-flat tyres. Talking of options even this high spec Cooper S model had £5,600 worth of options fitted to it giving it an on-the-road price of £30,545.





It has the usual Driving Modes and ride comfort selection but some of the added options should be included as standard - items such as the must-have Wind Deflector which is part of the £650 Convertible Pack which also includes heated front seats. The Wind Deflector worked well, minimising the wind buffeting felt inside the cabin, but it can only be put in place if it's just the front two seats being used. Rear seat passengers will enjoy the comfy two rear seats but will feel short-changed by the minimal legroom. The multi-layer insulated fabric roof goes up and down electrically with ease at low speeds but when it's in its down position, being a pram-like design so it doesn't cut into the boot space too much, it restricts rear visibility.



As for performance the top speed is 143 mph, zero to 62 mph takes 7.2 seconds, the Combined Cycle fuel economy is 44.8 mpg and on my gentile, top-down 'Cotswold cruise' the real-life figure was an impressive 44.4 mpg. The CO2 emissions are 145 g/km so First



Year VED road tax rate costs £205 followed by the standard rate of £140. Company car drivers will pay 30% Benefit-in-Kind tax. Insurance is group 29E and the warranty is three years unlimited mileage.

VERDICT

Like all MINIs the latest Convertible is like a good wine, it improves with age and this particular vintage is 25 years old – cheers!

For: Iconic and desirable premium brand, strong residual values, good driving dynamics, impeccable interior quality with unique MINI design language, strong engine with linear power delivery through a slick-changing manual gearbox, realistic real-life fuel economy, fun wind-in-the-hair motoring.

Against: Pricey, some options should be standard, restricted rear view visibility with the canvas top down, small boot, tight rear seat legroom for adult passengers.



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

2018 MINI Cooper S Convertible.

Price: £23,830 (£30,545 as tested with options).

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder, turbocharged petrol, 192 hp, 300 Nm (221 lb.ft) of torque from just 1,350 rpm, six speed close ratio sports manual.



Performance: 143 mph, 0-62 mph 7.2-seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 44.8 mpg (44.4 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 145 g/km, VED road tax £205/£140, BiK company car tax 30%.

Insurance Group: 29E.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 3,850 mm (12.63 ft), W 1,727 mm (5.67 ft), H 1,415 mm (4.64 ft), boot space 215 litres (7.59 cu.ft), two doors/four seats.