Latest MINIs – News and First Impressions

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MINI – Keeping the pedal to the metal with new model introductions

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency)

MINI Clubman Black Pack joins the line-up

Like their parent company BMW, MINI is keeping the ‘pedal to the metal’ by introducing a raft of additional derivatives of their core model ranges.

At last week’s 2017 range review Nicholas Griebner, Head of Product for MINI UK said “Last year one out of 50 new cars sold in the UK was a MINI and so far this year sales are

up by a further 7%.” In 2016 MINI sold a record 70,000 new cars with the three door Hatch remaining the most popular taking 35% of sales, the five door Hatch 30%, Clubman estate 15%, Countryman 10% (normally 15% but lower due to the changeover period between new versions) and the Convertible 10%.

Running through the latest offerings in the range, Nicholas Griebner said that the MINI John Cooper Challenge, a John Cooper Works three door Hatch with Performance Pack, had a production run of just 50 units and all were sold except two. This limited edition model is available for the UK market only. It has a 2.0 litre turbo 210 hp petrol engine, manual transmission with a torque biased limited slip differential, adjustable suspension dampers, adjustable ride height and lightweight wheels and is priced at £30,445.

As they are mostly sold there is also the new Cooper S Works 210 three door Hatch, priced from £22,155. This is designed to sit in the range between the JCW 231 hp and Cooper S 192 hp three door Hatch models. This model has the 2.0 litre turbo 210 hp petrol engine, a JCW Sport Pack, tuning kit and 17-inch black alloy wheels.

Still with a turn of speed in mind, MINI has introduced JCW versions of their new larger C-segment Countryman SUV styled models. This model has a 2.0 litre 231 hp twin turbo petrol engine with ALL4 traction as standard, and goes from zero to 62 mph in just 6.5 seconds. The price is £31,430.

On a less pacey note MINI will add their first production electric vehicle to the range. It gets its public debut on the 29 June at the Goodwood Festival of Speed. Known as the Cooper S E Countryman ALL4, this is a PHEV, (Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle) and it costs £31,575 less the £2,500 Government Plug-In Grant. This model has a front mounted three-cylinder turbo 136 hp petrol engine driving the front wheels with an 88 hp electric motor at the rear driving the rear wheels, giving it the ALL4 system. Total power output is 224 hp, zero to 62 mph takes 6.8 seconds and it has an official 25 miles of pure electric power driving range. The official Combined Cycle fuel economy figure is 134.5 mpg with CO2 emissions of 49 g/km. This means zero First Year VED cost and then £130 Standard rate for

Year Two onwards. Company car Benefit-in-Kind tax is rated at 9%.

Whilst not commenting on sales numbers Nicholas Griebner did say that their dealership sales staff is being trained to clarify what type of journeys potential customers do on a regular basis. High mileage users will still be advised to continue with petrol or diesel models but the PHEV technology is most suited to shorter commuter trips and to maximise the use of the electric plug-in function to get the best fuel economy. Fully charged the vehicle should be able to cover commuter or shopping trips of around 20 miles in length without using petrol at all. For longer journeys there is no range anxiety because the petrol engine takes over once the battery power is depleted.

On a more practical everyday note MINI have introduced Clubman Black Pack additions to the six door estate range. These are based on Cooper 1.5 litre petrol and Cooper D 2.0 litre diesel versions and cost £21,430 and £23,735 respectively. There are also automatic transmission options for both engines. The Cooper petrol is offered with a six-speed unit for an extra £1,495 and the Cooper D an eight speed auto for £1,595. If bought separately the Black Pack spec options would add £925 to the price of a standard Countryman Cooper/Cooper D models but this unique to the UK market Black Pack spec adds £700 to the standard price.

The Black Pack specification includes silver-grey lower body paintwork, black roof, black wheelarch mouldings and sills, black bonnet stripes, 17-inch black alloy wheels, exclusive Black Pack badging and Piano Black interior trim. Specification also includes sat-nav, DAB radio, Bluetooth, cruise control and MINI Connected functions.



Clubman Black bonnet styling stripes.



Black Pack specific sports wheels.

Driven...

Once the presentations had been completed at the MINI 2017 media range roundup of new and future models, it was time to put my foot to the floor and sample what was on offer in the way of a main model test drive. The Cooper Works 210 and JCW Challenge variants were a bit too niche. The Countryman ALL4 I have tested recently so I opted for perhaps the most versatile of the range, the relatively new C-segment Clubman but with the new Black Pack specification.



My test version was the Cooper variant with its 1.5 litre, three cylinder turbo petrol engine, and to be honest you would really not know this is a three-pot unit instead of a ‘four’. With 136 hp, but more importantly 230 Nm (170 lb.ft) of torque delivered from a low (for a petrol engine) 1,250 rpm, the performance was lively and really responsive and the engine was quiet. It was brisk for acceleration with zero to 62mph taking 9.1 seconds, and with a top speed of 127 mph. My test car had a six speed manual gearbox with well-spaced gear ratios. Given the torque available at low rpm engine speeds, the vehicle felt responsive at low speeds in top gear and brisk underway once traffic was cleared, with lively acceleration

through the mid-range. The fuel economy was impressive as well.

Driving over a route of mixed Cotswold country roads, with some stop-start in town traffic, the vehicle returned an impressive 51.5 mpg against the official Combined Cycle figure of 55.4 mpg, which was very good. With CO2 emissions of 121 g/km VED road tax is £160 First Year rate then £140 Standard Rate thereafter. Company car drivers will pay 23% Benefit-in-Kind tax. Unless you are a really high mileage driver there is no point in paying more money to choose the Cooper D diesel model.

The Clubman, like other new generation MINI models, uses the latest BMW Group compact car platform so it is larger than the first generation and more user-friendly, be it for family or business use. MINI has high hopes for the Clubman in the company car market although it still lags behind the popularity of the Hatchbacks with demand driven by retail buyers. There is growing demand however for the bulkier looking Countryman models as SUVs are the current favourites for new car buyers.

This generation Clubman with its longer length of 4,253 mm (13.95 ft), 1,800 mm (5.91 ft) wide stance, four passenger doors and unique twin side hinged rear ‘barn’ doors is a really practical vehicle to live with. With all the five seats in use there is a boot space of 360 litres (12.71 cu.ft) and when folded down this space increases to 1,250 litres (44.14 cu.ft).



Inside it’s all about quality. Travelling in the Clubman, like all other new generation MINIs, is like being inside a BMW. High quality fit-and-finish, comfortable supportive seats, nice controls and a good level of specification neatly enhanced by the Piano Black trim inserts. It’s a nicely balanced car as well due to its longer wheelbase, not as nimble perhaps as a MINI Hatch but overall the ride comfort is more refined. The new Black Pack specification just adds that even more exclusive level of high class specification.



Clubman Black Pack specific interior styling inserts.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.



VERDICT

A practical, high quality car, and priced at £21,430 this petrol Cooper version is relatively not that expensive, something it isn't always possible to say about modern day MINIs.

For: Probably the Clubman is the most practical MINI yet, Black Pack adds higher visual distinctive specification for very little extra money, classy interior, responsive fuel efficient petrol engine.

Against: Nothing obvious.

Milestones and Wheels-Alive in Brief:

MINI Cooper Clubman Black Pack manual estate.

Price: £21,430.

Engine/transmission: 1.5 litre, three cylinder turbo petrol, 135 hp, 230 Nm (170 lb.ft) of torque from 1,250 rpm, six speed manual.

Performance: 127 mph, 0–62 mph 9.1 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 55.4 mpg (51.5 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 121 g/km, VED £160/£140, BiK company car tax 23%. Insurance Group: 17E tbc.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,253 mm (13.95 ft), W 1,800 mm (5.91 ft), H 1,441 mm (4.73 ft), boot/load space 360 to 1,250 litres (12.71 to 44.14 cu.ft), five seats/six doors.