MINI Cooper S Convertible – Road Test

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The MINI Cooper S Convertible Exclusive test driven by Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

The British MINI is as traditional as a cup of tea, and next year it will be particularly apt because it's the Convertible's 20th anniversary.

Launched four years after the new generation MINI hatch was unveiled by parent BMW in 2000, the MINI Convertible has moved through four generations which now also includes a completely electric version.

It's a neat soft-top package providing four-seat open air motoring compared to most rag-tops' two seats, unless you go for a much more expensive and larger car from a premium maker.

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The MINI Convertible, tested in Cooper S Exclusive trim and priced at £32,554 including options, is not short of sophistication though and our gutsy 2.0 litre petrol engine was mated to a sophisticated seven-speed automatic transmission delivering drive to the front wheels.

The combination is well matched, giving brisk pull-away, effortless overtaking and relaxed cruising. What's more with just 1,325 kg (2,921 lb) at the kerb it easily managed over 40mpg of mixed driving.

The four-cylinder BMW designed engine was smooth and fairly quiet even when revved and did not appear to hesitate or hold back as the power flowed through to the wonderfully slick, quick and quiet automatic transmission.

A driver can select normal, sport or eco modes which enhance performance or economy as preferred, or simply settle for somewhere which offers the balance between them. You can

immediately feel the difference moving through the modes on a toggle-button selector which like some other secondary switches on the console are reminiscent of the original Mini from 1959.

Also harking back to the basic original Mini is the central round multi-function infotainment display but because it does so much is a very large dial with touchscreen functionality. We found it a bit slow responding to changes and inputs, notably the hook up to a mobile phone, or moving between features.

BBC R4 11:32
COMMUNICATION
MEDIA/RADIO
22
August
BBC Radio 4
MODE
A/C
START
STOP
P
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The driver's display consists of three small dials and partly overlaid on each other and they carried the usual speed, tacho, fuel and other levels/ warnings. Although compact they were clear.

The usual column stalks covered lights and wipers/ wash and were close to the wheel rim with the spokes holding more buttons to select driving assistance systems.

The steering wheel had a reasonable adjustment range and the turning action was light and provided good feedback, particularly on twisting roads, while being light for parking.

We liked the powerful brakes underfoot and welcomed the traditional mechanical handbrake even if it was not easy to use when the console box, which held an inductive phone charger, was in its horizontal position and not tipped up. The throttle was smooth and light in action too.

Heating and ventilation was very good as it should be in any convertible in British weather, with multi-layered hood which could be partly or fully retracted, powered windows and excellent output onto the feet or fresher air to the face. Even the back window was heated.

Opening the roof was quick but when it completed the whole thing sat in your line of sight through the mirror and you'd have to rely on the car's reversing camera to see objects behind on the ground. Good sized electric door mirrors, efficient wipers and bright headlights provided excellent vision to sides and front however.

Oddments room was modest and tight so I would expect most users would simply throw items onto the rear twin bucket seats if they could not fit into the glovebox, door bins or console trays. The boot opening is small and really only suitable for a soft bag or shopping and then only if you're on a diet.

Access was easy to the front seats and not too difficult into the back pair but those behind really have very little space but a lot of headroom. The leather seats have extending thigh supports infront and all were really well shaped and surprisingly comfortable for any journey for two people.

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Ride quality was on the firm side, not really uncomfortable, just stiffer than in most family cars. It coped well with any surface and its wheel-at-each-corner really endowed it with excellent positive handling and grip, although it did produce some noise from the sporting

wheels and tyres.

There was no pitch or wallowing, diving or rolling about over undulating country lanes, just that occasional banging and bumping.

Road noise was probably the mot intrusive on poor surfaces and engine or wind noises were low when the roof was closed. Open up and the traffic and country noises came in along with a fair bit of buffeting which could be minimised with windows up and a baffle screen fitted, but that limited the already tight rear seat room.

There is simply nothing quite like the MINI Convertible Cooper S on sale in Britain and it therefore holds value well, which is another consideration.

VERDICT

MINI has a winner on their hands and will undoubtedly with the new additional pure-electric versions keep the sales pot boiling.

For: Quick folding versatile powered roof, strong build quality, brisk and stable performance, high quality interior, nice controls with smooth auto gearchanges, fun to drive, high kerb appeal in Summer.

Against: Very small boot, folded hood restricts rear vision, very limited rear legroom, firm ride, expensive options.

FAST FACTS

Model: MINI Cooper S Convertible Exclusive

Price: £32,554 inc £1,750 options

Mechanical: 176 bhp 4 cyl 2.0 turbo-petrol, 7 sp auto

Max Speed: 143 mph

0 – 62 mph: 6.9 sec

Combined MPG: 40.6

Insurance Group: 21

C02 emissions: 143 g/km

Tax costs: Bik rating 33%, VED £255FY, £180SR

Warranty: 3 years/ unlimited

Size: L 3.87 m (12.70 ft), W 1.73 m (5.68 ft), H 1.42 m (4.66 ft)

Bootspace: 215 litres (7.59 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 1,325 kg (2,921 lb)