MINI John Cooper Works First Impressions.

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The fastest production MINI to date…

Reviewed by Chris Adamson

Alec Issigonis may have been the creator of the original Mini but it was the vision of performance specialist, the late and much missed John Cooper, that is really responsible for its iconic status.

His inspiration continues today with new owners BMW retaining the John Cooper Works (JCW) tag-line for its range-topping, three-door performance model – the fastest production Mini to date.

If you need a hand to distinguish the JCW from its siblings even after the key has turned on the twin-power 2 litre turbocharged power house – signified by the rich exhaust tone, there are lots of clues.

For starters it has a more masculine and aggressive look than before, with a flared snout supplied by enlarged front air intakes set into the low front bib, topped off with a menacing honeycomb grille, while at the rear the twin central mounted sports exhausts are set into the low rear bumper assembly all complemented by a swept back rear spoiler.

Inside, the sports theme features sculpted bucket seats with integrated head restraints which are supportive and surprisingly comfortable, even with a slightly larger framed driver on board.



The busy cabin bristles with technology, which means that the JCW is installed with lots of controls and large instrument read-outs and displays combined with classic toggle switches.



Unfortunately there is a bit of confusion in the design and layout and it lacks a cohesive harmony.

The use of a myriad of surface textures and colours is another slightly irritating feature but beloved of the modern tech generation – my aversion to this probably shows my age and

demand for historical continuity.

A lot has changed since the first Cooper Minis and, perhaps, the biggest of these is the extensive list of options that mean you can pay in excess of £30,000 should you decide to stack everything imaginable on-board.

That's just exactly what MINI had chosen to do on the example they put me behind the wheel of – naturally they want to show off everything they have in the accessories package.

So you start off with a basic price of £22,315 (that includes the Chancellor's cut, plus those leather black sport seats for free) and then you really start shopping.

Let's throw in satellite navigation, Bluetooth connection, rain sensing wipers, automatic air conditioning, heated front seats, adaptive headlights, Harman Kardon hi-fi system and telecommunications unit.

These are just some of the gadgetry that add an additional £7,000 to the basic price – even bonnet stripes once obligatory on the Cooper versions cost an extra £80.

On the Road

Press the start button and you instantly fire up the all-new 228bhp, two litre transversely mounted four-cylinder turbocharged, direct injection, variable valve control, petrol power plant lurking under those bonnet stripes.



Gentle at first, the turbo kicks in hard; over 3,000 rpm announces itself with both verbal and physical manifestations – this is a car that doesn't fail to deliver shed-loads of grunt from the off.

Slotting through the short-shift, six speed manual transmission, the responses are instantaneous. Hence it will get off the line to 62 mph in well under six-and-a-half seconds, and go from 50mph to 70mph in around five seconds – which is only fractionally slower than the optional (more expensive) automatic alternative.

Drivers can select, depending on their mood and driving conditions, between Sport, Normal

and Economy driving modes, which vary the accelerator responses, variable dampers and the engine sound.

The automatic Stop-Start engine operation stretches fuel economy, even on this performance version – without too much consideration for the planet, I managed to see a return of 31 mpg; however this was well shy of the official figure of 42.2 mpg, which is even less than the 49 mpg promised by the automatic transmission version.

As well as being thirstier, the much more enjoyable manual version is, it has to be admitted, a tad dirtier, emissions going up from the 133 g/km of the auto to 155 g/km.

Kart -like handling was the underlying characteristic of the original Cooper Minis and thankfully it is still there with just a hint of predictable understeer, which means it goes exactly where you point it.

The handling is enhanced by its inherent low centre of gravity, the installation of an electronic differential to make optimum use of the power, and a host of electronic wizardry such as Dynamic Stability Control, Torque Steer Compensation and Dynamic Traction Control.

For drivers there is a good feel at the thick grippy steering wheel, with quick responses to any input and lots of feedback so that this tearaway always feels assured and in control.

Firm but not overtly harsh sports suspension uses a single-joint spring front axle and multi-link rear axle, with variable dampers – and the whole thing rides, in this case, on stylish optional five-spoke light alloy 18 inch rims with low profile run-flat tyres.

Showing clearly through the rims are the race-tuned Brembo sports brakes fitted with 330 mm (13 inch) front discs that bring everything to a halt in double-quick time.

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Verdict

The John Cooper tagged example is still the MINI to have for real enthusiasts, but it is no longer the stripped out pocket-rocket it used to be.

This car has all the sophistication, style, personality and performance you could wish for in a wonderfully responsive driving package… if you can afford it.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

MINI John Cooper Works

Engine: 1,998cc four-cylinder turbocharged

Transmission: Six speed manual

Power: 231ps (170 kW)(228bhp)

Torque: 236 lb/ft (320 Nm)

Performance:

0-62mph: 6.3 seconds

Top Speed: 153 mph



Fuel Consumption: Official Figure, 42.2 mpg (Combined)/on-test 31 mpg

CO2 Emissions: 155 g/km

Price (On the Road): From: £23.050 – as tested £30,600