News from Mini – and John Cooper Works (JCW) hatch version First Impressions

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MINI NEWS AND JOHN COOPER WORKS HATCH FIRST DRIVE NEWS.

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) reports...

At last week's MINI UK media test drive day the BMW Group brand brought along their 60th anniversary Edition Hatch model as well as the revised John Cooper Works (JCW) Hatch version to be sampled.

With a 60th anniversary Edition model already scheduled into my forthcoming road test diary I wheeled myself out onto the winding Lambourn area country roads near Newbury for a brief blast.

Available from March this year the JCW Hatch and Convertible came back on stream with a revised 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbocharged 231 hp petrol engine with six speed manual or

eight speed Steptronic automatic gearbox choices. The previous JCW models ceased production in July last year prior to revised power units being developed to meet the new Euro 6.2d-TEMP emission regulations. Billed in March this year as the most powerful production engines ever for a MINI the JCW three door Hatch version is priced at £25,950 for the manual and £27,330 for the auto. The two door Convertible is £29,250 for the manual and £30,630 for the auto.

However the MINI brand doesn’t stand still for long and very recently announced for July ordering are even more powerful JCW versions. These are the Clubman and Countryman versions which use a new 2.0 litre, four cylinder 306 hp turbo petrol engine but they come as standard with an eight speed Steptronic auto gearbox and ALL4 all-wheel-drive traction. They are priced at £34,250 and £35,550 respectively.

At the media day MINI UK spokesperson Helen Wilson said that JCW models account for about 5% of all new MINI UK sales, around 3,000 units a year. The three-door Hatch is the most popular version followed by the Convertible, Clubman and then the Countryman.

MINI sold a total of 67,021 cars in the UK last year, a small 1.68% fall in sales due to the 6.83% drop in the overall UK new cars sales. For the first six months of this year the MINI brand has sold 33,250 new cars – a fall of 2.56% over the same period last year in a new car market which has fallen by 3.41%.

The MINI JCW Hatch priced at £25,950 is based upon the 192 hp Cooper S specification but

in addition to its more powerful engine the JCW bespoke equipment includes 17-inch spoked alloy wheels in black, Piano Black exterior styling trim such as wheelarch edges, side sills, grille surround and lower front bumper trim, sports suspension, aerodynamic kit and spoiler, sports exhaust, performance braking system with red brake calipers and JCW logo.

Inside the JCW treatment includes sports seats, sports steering wheel with multi-function controls, Piano Black trim inserts, stainless steel pedals, Anthracite headlining, JCW door sill finishes plus the usual carry-over, MINI driving mode settings of Sport, Mid and Green and cruise control with emergency braking function. Front electric windows, air con, connectivity, sound system and all the usual high quality fit and finish comes from other lesser performing models as well. However there are still lots of extra cost options that customers can select – but at a price. There were £3,560 worth on my test car, Navigation Plus Pack at £2,000, Comfort Pack at £900, Adaptive Suspension at £600 and a mere £60 for a first aid kit and warning triangle.

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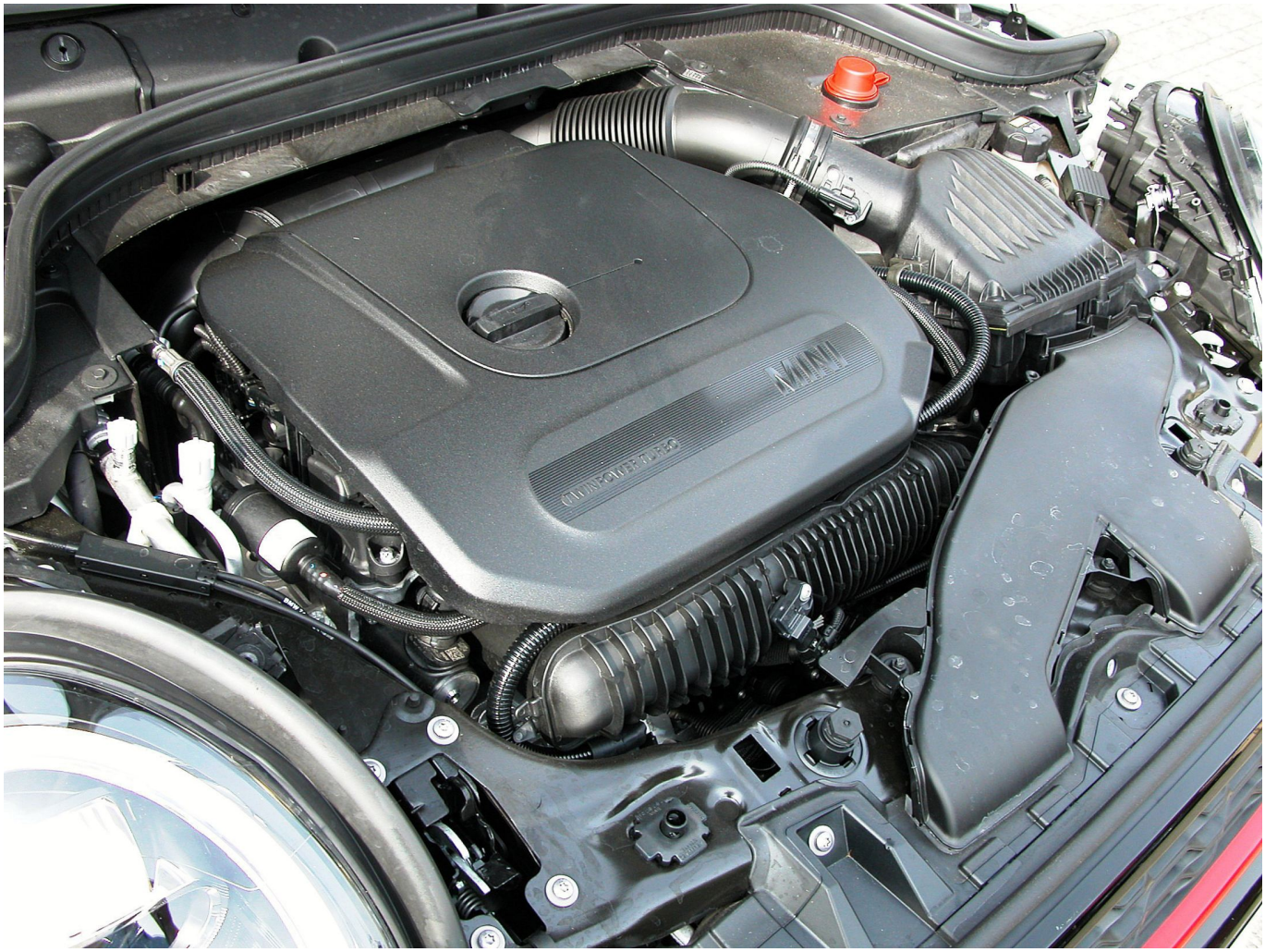
As with every MINI Hatch and Convertible model on sale in the UK, JCW models also have standard-fit front and rear LED lights, automatic headlights with rain sensors, MINI Excitement Pack including ambient interior lighting, exterior MINI Logo projection and much more.



Like all revised MINI petrol engines the revised JCW 2.0 litre turbo petrol engine is equipped with a petrol particulate filter which is integrated into the standard sports exhaust system, ensuring both models enjoy a characteristic sound inside and outside the vehicle whilst meeting the strict Euro 6.2d c and d-TEMP emission standards. MINI say the introduction of the latest pollutant reduction technology does not adversely affect the fuel economy or CO2 emissions of these models.

The JCW Hatch six speed manual gearbox version I had a brief test drive in last week not only produces a very healthy and refined power output of 231 hp but importantly 320 Nm (236 lb.ft) of torque through a wide powerband from 1,450 to 4,800 rpm. Top speed is an

impressive but not legally usable, unless it's for a track day experience, of 153 mph. However the zero to 62 mph acceleration time of 6.3 seconds is far more important for cut-and-thrust road use, especially overtaking slower traffic in the shortest possible distance and time. The manual gearchange was on the heavy side and perhaps not as notch-free as it should be but the ratios were well suited for the engine power and torque outputs.

The official new WLTP Combined Cycle fuel consumption figure was 38.7 to 40.4 mpg and on my short test drive around the winding Lambourn Valley roads near Newbury the real-life figure was 33.5 mpg. The all important CO2 figure is 162 g/km so First Year VED road tax costs £530 followed by the Standard rate of £145. The BiK company car tax rate is a high 36% and insurance is Group 29E which given the performance and price is acceptable. Warranty is three years/unlimited-miles – the same as any other MINI model.

VERDICT

My brief reunion with a MINI JCW model showed a further refinement in most every direction. It has more specification, it has certainly moved even more up-market as the ultimate MINI to have, the instrument layout is typical new generation MINI oozing in high quality materials and on this front it is another gradual move away from being what a hard-core compact street racer was. The increased refinement is further evident in the overall handling and significantly improved ride quality. Now some potential owners will miss the needle sharp agility, the hectic pitch and yaw handling from the lightweight feeling previous generation versions. This new model is far more refined… Yes it's just as fast, and it's just as

responsive with copious amounts of mid-range ‘grunt’ but it is all delivered in a more sophisticated way. Of course refinement doesn’t mean it’s less capable for high speed cornering ability, it just does it in a more sophisticated way, more soft-core than hard core. It seems a very grown-up model to be carrying the John Cooper Works badge, what it’s lost in its edginess it’s gained in sophistication, specification and price. It might now be just too sophisticated for hard-core sports hatch drivers.

For: More refined power and torque delivery, better ride compliancy, higher specification, fast but not furious performance, chunky sports exterior styling, high quality interior.

Against: Not as ‘raw’ as an out-and-out hot-hatch track day street racer as before, heavy/notchy gearchange, small boot, no five Door JCW Hatch model, a top spec Cooper S Hatch looks better value for not a lot less performance.

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

2019 MINI John Cooper Works 3-Door Hatch manual.

Price: £25,950 (£29,705 as tested).

Engine/transmission: JCW tuned EU 6.2-TEMP compliant 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbocharged petrol 231 hp, 320 Nm (236 lb.ft) of torque, six speed manual.

Performance: 153 mph, 0–62 mph 6.3 seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle 38.7–40.4 mpg (33.5 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 162 g/km, VED First Year road tax £530 then £145 Standard rate, BiK company car tax 36%.

Insurance Group: 29E.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 3,875 mm (12.71 ft), W 1,722 mm (5.65 ft), H 1,414 mm (4.64 ft), boot/load space 211 to 731 litres (7.45 to 25.81 cu.ft), three doors/four seats.