

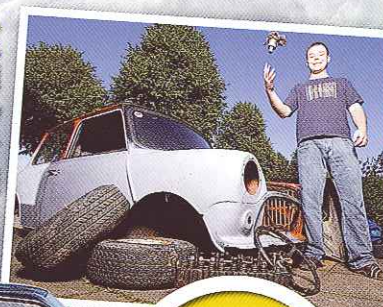
THE No.1 MAGAZINE FOR MINI OWNERS

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mini magazine

MINI ON FIRE

A burnt-out shell would be an easy first project — or so he thought!



WIN!

Limited edition
Dremel kit
See page 22

FEATURED CARS



SPORTPACK SUPREMACY

Rover Cooper will make you green with envy



GT REPLICA REBUILT TWICE

...and her father thought it was just a passing fad!



CUSTOM CLUBBY SHOW STOPPER

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This very original Mk1 is a rare piece of history



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Our buying guide to the carb'ed Rover Cooper

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22

Rover Cooper (1990-91)

With the Mini being out performed by other supermini rivals Rover had to do something, luckily for us they chose to revive the Cooper brand with this carb model.

Words **Martin Vincent**
Photography **Paul Smith**



OWNER'S TALE

Rich Moorcraft has owned his immaculate carb'd Rover Cooper for just over a year now and he's delighted he's found such a genuine example. "Early carb Coopers are a rare sight now," Rich tells us, "as most have rotted away or been turned into something else." After touching up a few little scratches and with just over 27,000 miles on the clock he really has found a gem. "It's standard and staying that way," he tells us. With a pre-injection, carb'd engine the only thing that he's considering is taking off the catalytic convertor to release a few more bhp.



The re-introduction of the Mini Cooper in 1990 was an event of great significance for the future of the Mini brand. For years, BL and Rover had allowed the Mini to wallow in insignificance, a mere shadow of its former self, but here at last was a mainstream Mini that offered some of the driving spirit that the Mini was once famous for. The buying public obviously agreed because not only was the new Cooper with its 1275cc engine an immediate success but it went on to achieve 40 per cent of all new Mini sales.

The story begins in the late 1980s when John Cooper Garages were selling a steady stream of accessories and performance conversions

bearing the Cooper name. Many of these went to Japan, one of the Mini's prime markets and soon to become its largest market of all. John Cooper Garages had also developed a Rover-approved tuning kit for the Mini (initially for the Mini 30 and the Flame, Racing and Checkmate limited editions of 1989) and this was sold and fitted via selected Rover dealers.

Rover was aware that there was a demand for a more sporting breed of Mini and was also aware that the Cooper name was a powerful marketing tool. John Cooper and his son Michael, who was at this time was actively running the Cooper Garages business, were invited by Rover MD Graham Day to discuss the proposed new Mini Cooper. The focus of discussion was a sporting version of the Mini using the 1275cc single SU-carb engine from the Metro.

A number of prototype 1275cc Metro-engined Minis were built by John Cooper Garages to show just how effective such a car could be and, after further

discussions, an arrangement was duly made for Rover to acquire the Cooper name from the TKM Group. The next step was to involve its development division — Rover Special Projects, based at Gaydon — to build a 1275 Mini Cooper for assessment, with input from John Cooper Garages and also from ERA Special Vehicles, who had recently produced a small run of turbocharged Minis.

Two versions of the new 1275cc Mini Cooper were announced to the press on July 10, 1990. A Special Edition version would be available straight away, albeit as a limited edition, while the slightly less highly specified production Cooper would be available from September. As the first 1275cc Minis for 10 years and the first with a Cooper badge since 1972, the launch generated huge media interest and the new Mini Cooper was hailed as a brilliant success.

The Special Edition became known retrospectively as the RSP (Buying Guide MM124) even though it was built on the normal Mini line at Longbridge — not by Rover Special Products. It differed only in having additional equipment and accessories and could be identified by the twin white bonnet stripes incorporating the John Cooper signature. It also had a sunroof, red

carpeting, red leather-rim steering wheel and black leather panelled Lightning upholstery. The interior was in fact identical to the Mini Thirty, apart from the Mini Cooper tags sewn onto the seats to cover the Mini Thirty logos. This limited edition cost £6995 and it sold out almost immediately despite the fact that it cost some £1400 more than the Mini Thirty limited edition of the previous year. In total there were 1050 John Cooper Special Edition Minis for the home market and a further 600 for Japan.

The production version in standard guise lacked the white bonnet stripes, sunroof, and driving lamps although all of these could be fitted as cost options. The interior for the mainstream version had black carpeting and Crayon fabric seat trim, while all versions of the Cooper had opening rear quarter windows, stainless steel bumpers and a stainless steel grille in a similar style to the MkII Cooper. The power unit was a 61 bhp catalysed version of the earlier MG Metro engine/gearbox and this was equipped with a 3.11 final drive ratio, an oil cooler and modified exhaust. The spec also included front disc brakes and Minilite style 12 inch wheels in silver.

The Cooper models came in a choice of red, metallic racing green or black coachwork, all



The interior was black with vinyl doorcards and 'crayon' trimmed seats.

Own an original Mini?

Tell us! Simply e-mail mark. robinson@futurenet.co.uk if you'd like to have it photographed for a buying guide

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

GENERAL

The pre-injection Cooper was made for just over a year so this is nowhere near as commonplace as the Cooper 1.3i. As such, be prepared to search for a while to find a decent example. Most original examples will suffer from body rot to some extent and Minis of this era seem to be particularly prone to corrosion problems. Most will have had some panel repairs so be particularly careful to check for signs of bad workmanship. Sills, apex panels and front wings are most likely to have been replaced. That said, it is possible to come across immaculate examples that have been garaged from new. If you find one of these, buy it; don't waste time on a rust-bucket that will cost far more in the long-run to return to decent condition.

INTERIOR AND SEATS

The Cooper shared its Crayon seat trim with the Mini Flame, Racing and Checkmate and this was in cloth rather than the half-leather of later Coopers. The main difference between the normal pre-injection Cooper and the RSP is the interior. The normal Cooper had black carpets and black steering wheel whereas the RSP was red for these items. Also, the RSP had leather panels in the seats. A full-width burr-walnut fascia was a cost option, as was a glass sunroof by Tudor Webasto. If so equipped, look out for evidence of leaks, which may be difficult to fix.

ENGINE

The 1275cc engine was the same unit as that fitted to the MG Metro 1.3 and was equipped with a single SU carb and an oil cooler as standard. The four-speed gearbox was also the same as the Metro unit apart from the 3.1 final drive ratio. Spares are cheap and plentiful. Look out

for the obvious telltale signs such as untoward noises, oil leaks, misfiring, or blue or white smoke from the exhaust. Note that the production Cooper had a Cooper logo on the airfilter cover but this was not present on the RSP. There should be an oil cooler on the right hand side.



with a white roof and white door mirrors. Three other colours were also available; White Diamond, Storm Grey and Quicksilver and were complemented with a black roof and door mirrors instead of white. Both had twin white or black coachlines and the Cooper laurel-wreath insignia on each rear wing. The mainstream went on sale at £6595, the lower price reflecting a more basic specification compared with the RSP. Three different

accessory packs (named RAC Rally, Italian Job and Monte Carlo) were available at extra cost for further personalisation.

In all respects the Cooper came across as a wonderfully characterful little car that encapsulated a level of sporting appeal that the non-Cooper cars lacked. As such, it now appealed to a much wider clientele with its more macho stance. The magic of the Cooper name was a powerful factor, as was the reintroduction of a larger 1275 engine for the Mini. At last, the

Mini was once again a desirable option for the male car buyer — in recent years it had become very much an economy car and was bought primarily by women drivers. The new Mini Cooper would change that perception for good.

The Cooper looked right and it felt right. No wonder it gained popularity so quickly. The press too lauded the new Cooper and loved its handling and its feisty character despite its limitations (poor refinement, harsh ride, high noise levels), voting it a

sporting hero despite its marked lack of straight-line performance in comparison with the much quicker sporting superminis available at the time. To a large extent that performance gap could be bridged by opting for the Cooper S performance pack available from John Cooper Garages and also through selected dealers. In standard guise the Cooper was good for 92 mph and 0-60 mph in 11.2 secs; not fast but it was still the quickest Mini for years and,

MAKING THE COOPER QUICKER

The carburettor Metro 1275 engine unit is just begging for some more power to be released. The catalytic converter robs it of power and this can be replaced by a conventional big-bore exhaust and LCB

manifold for immediate gains, once the carb is adjusted to suit. There is no legal requirement to keep the cat in place. Fitting a performance cylinder head is another easy route to more performance.

BODYWORK

Rust is the usual problem with any Mini of this age, and they do rust just about everywhere. That said, all body panels are readily available, and you can even buy a complete new bodysell if you have deep pockets. This is the MkVI type bodysell and it has slightly different engine mounting points to accommodate the 1275cc engine.

Although rust can be dealt with, it is far cheaper in the long run to seek out as rust-free an example as you can find because body repairs and resprays don't come cheap. The usual suspect areas apply, so look carefully at sills, front wings (especially around the headlamps), wheelarches, the bottoms

of doors, the A-panels, boot and bootlid, around the windscreen and scuttle, and in the front corners of the floor beneath the carpets. Also, anywhere where panels join with a seam needs close scrutiny. The rear subframe could well be iffy on a Mini of this age.

Look for the correct badging. There is a double white pinstripe along each side, each ending in a Cooper laurel wreath badge. If missing, replacement decals are readily available. Jap-market cars have a Rover badge on the bootlid, but are otherwise similar to UK-spec cars. It's possible that you may come across one of these that has been re-imported.

WHEELS

You might think that these are the same 4.5x12 inch Minilite style alloys as those fitted to the Cooper 1.3i, but there is in fact a subtle difference. For the pre-injection Cooper, the wheel nuts are in line with the wheel spokes (which are slightly cut away for clearance), whereas the Cooper 1.3i had a similar design wheel with identical dimensions but with the wheel nut centres between the spokes rather than in line with them.

SUSPENSION & BRAKES

The suspension and brakes for the Cooper were basically no different to any other Mini of the period, so nothing special here, with front discs and drum rear brakes allied to Mini dry rubber suspension and telescopic dampers. The brakes often have a hard time on a Mini so don't be surprised if the front pads and discs need replacing. The short-travel suspension also has to work hard on a Mini and rear trailing arm pivot points are prone to wear, as are the bushes on the front suspension.



crucially, it felt a lot quicker than the figures suggested.

The carburettor-fed 1275cc engine fitted to the Cooper was not one that could stay around in the face of increasingly stringent emissions regulations and, just a year after launch, this first version of the born-again Cooper was revised and a single-point injection version of the same engine was installed (from October 1991).

For many though, it is the first version with its more easily-tuned SU carb engine

that represents the best of the '90s Coopers and good examples are still worth seeking out. Many will look for the rarer and more flashy RSP version but the production Cooper is virtually identical in all but a few minor details. It's also a great Mini to drive and to own. Given the choice most enthusiasts would opt for a carb'd Cooper, so buying a '90-'91 model therefore makes sense if you can find a good one — so read on to find out how to do just that.



The engine was the same as that fitted to the MG Metro 1.3.



PRODUCTION HISTORY

1989

John and Michael Cooper meet with Rover to discuss a new Mini Cooper.

1989

Rover's Special Projects division develops a Mini Cooper using a catalysed version of the MG Metro 1275cc carb-fed engine.

10 July 1990

The 'new' Mini Cooper is announced to the press and the public. There were two versions; a special edition with extra equipment would be released first (the RSP). The standard production Mini Cooper would follow.

September 1990

Production version of the Mini Cooper goes on sale.

March 1991

John Cooper performance kit launched to create Cooper S. Cost £1751. Handling pack also available.

September 1991

End of production of the carburettor version. Single-point injection Cooper 1.3i with half-leather interior and white bonnet stripes introduced a month later.

MINI COOPER S CONVERSION

From March 1991 you could buy an officially authorised John Cooper Performance Conversion Kit for the Mini Cooper which effectively made it a Cooper S. The kit was conceived by John Cooper Garages. Initially, any Rover dealer could fit the conversion. Later, however, it could only be carried out by John Cooper Garages at Worthing. The conversion consisted of a high performance cylinder head by Janspeed along with a free-flow exhaust, twin carbs and other mods. This boosted power to 78 bhp and raised the performance to a level that was almost identical to the original 1275 S from 1964, with a top speed close to 100 mph and 0-60 mph in under 10 seconds. Cars thus equipped can be identified by a numbered John Cooper Conversions plate rivetted to the floor crossmember by the driver's seat. There was also a certificate and Cooper S badging. It cost £1751 and there was also a handling kit for an extra £671.

COST OPTIONS

Glass sunroof, bonnet stripes (with or without John Cooper signature), driving lamps, burr-walnut full-width fascia

SPECIAL OPTION PACKS:

Kit A — The Italian Job Pack: Twin halogen driving lamps, bonnet stripes, loadspace liner

Kit B — The RAC Rally Pack: As above with tinted glass Tudor Webasto sunroof and mudflaps

Kit C — The Monte Carlo Pack: As Kit B with sump guard, locking wheel nuts and fire extinguisher





mini
magazine

Next month

Learn about the
Innocenti Cooper
Export



Identifying features:

Exterior

- Coachwork in red, metallic BRG or black with twin white coachlines and white roof (also in Storm Grey, Diamond White or Quicksilver with black roof and black coachlines)
- Cooper laurel wreath badge on rear quarters, Mini Cooper winged badge on bonnet
- 4.5x12 Minilite-style alloys in silver
- Black unpainted wheelarches and sill finishers
- Door mirrors in white (black door mirrors for Storm Grey, Diamond White and Quicksilver)
- Tinted glass
- Halogen headlamps

Interior

- Black carpeting
- Black leather-trimmed sports wheel with Cooper badge
- Crayon trim
- Red strip along interior door trim and rear quarter trim panel
- Triple instrument pack

Engine

- Cooper logo on airfilter cover
- Single carb 1275cc engine

INSURANCE QUOTE 1991 Rover Mini Cooper, value £3000

Male, 21, Orpington, Kent, 0 yrs NCB
£802.30/5000 miles; main car
£508.31/5000 miles; second car

Female, 32, Fort William, Scot, 3 yrs NCB
£222.52/5000 miles; main car
£116.71/5000 miles; second car

Male, 46, Great Barr, B'ham, 6 yrs NCB
£222.52/5000 miles; main car
£116.71/5000 miles; second car

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HOW MUCH TO PAY

These early Coopers are quite rare so they will always have value if the condition is good. That said, most enthusiasts seek out the rarer RSP model so you can still get an SU carb Cooper for decent money. Budget on £1000 or less for a car needing body repairs, with reasonable examples from £1500 to £3000. You shouldn't have to pay much more than this for a minter although RSPs will be more. The best one I came across was on the Pistonheads website: an original 1990 Cooper with a rust-free body, excellent interior and with all MoTs and receipts from new, waxoiled and garaged, and with a fresh MoT — just £2500.

Some more examples:

- 1990 Cooper needing some attention **£995**
- 1990 Cooper basically good condition with a few mods **£1495**
- 1991 Cooper, good condition, red, 2 owners and 67k **£2200**
- 1991 Cooper, original condition with superb bodywork, walnut dash, 19k, **£2500**
- 1990 Cooper with 1380 Swiftune and lots of mods **£3200**

SPEC 1990-91 Mini Cooper (SU carburettor)

ENGINE

1275cc four-cylinder OHV, SU carburettor
Bore/stroke 70.6 x 81.3 mm
Power 61 bhp @ 5550 rpm
Torque 61 lb.ft @ 3000 rpm

PERFORMANCE

(manufacturer's claimed figures)
0-60 mph 11.2 secs
Max speed 92 mph
Ave fuel economy 33 mpg

TRANSMISSION

Four-speed manual

SUSPENSION

Independent with rubber cones and telescopic dampers

BRAKES

Disc/drum

WHEELS AND TYRES

Minilite style 4.5x12 alloys
145/70x12 Pirelli CN56 tyres

DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHT

Length 3054 mm
Width 1410 mm
Height 1353 mm
Wheelbase 2035 mm
Weight 695 kg
Tank capacity 7.5 gal (34 litres)
Luggage capacity 4.1 cu ft