



Cabriolet retains the Mini's traditional handling virtues



No sign of scuttle shake. Wider tyres mean more grip

thrash and whine. The structural changes give a surprising refinement bonus, too. Until now, every Mini ever made has suffered a characteristic boom period at about 55mph, but this has been exorcised on the Cabriolet. With its hood up, this Mini is actually slightly quieter than a regular saloon.

Fold the hood down and the car remains a snug cocoon. Regardless of whether the four side windows are up or down, no wind gets into the cabin, even when the car is straining

every sinew to reach its 92mph top speed. Having the fabric stacked on the back of the car, rather than concealed in a cavity, makes the difference. It prevents air circling off the windscreen and thumping you on the back of the head.

Obviously, Rover could have contrived the hood without a conning tower effect at the back, but the rear seats would have had to be sacrificed. Accommodation is unaltered, which means two adults can bear to sit in the back for short

journeys only. The side rear windows are cleverly designed, pivoting through an arc to withdraw completely into the body.

The lined hood is nicely made and designed, too. After releasing two over-centre catches to detach it from the top of the windscreen, you can pull it back to the stowed position with one easy movement. Attaching the matching cover is the work of a moment because it's secured with three studs and two velcro strips. One thoughtful addition for

garageless owners is a lightweight plastic shroud for the entire hood, to prevent the fabric deteriorating from the combined effects of sunlight, rain and guano.

Rover builds the cabriolet on Longbridge's regular Mini assembly line at the rate of 15-20 cars a week, but it's terrific that the company finds it worthwhile to bother. The price tag of £11,995 seems incredible for a Mini, but it's not bad for such a well-conceived soft-top. ■

## Marcos recaptures the Cooper S spirit

With its twin carbs and flared arches, the 85bhp Checker is a time-warp triumph

INSPIRED BY DEMAND FROM JAPAN, MARCOS has transformed the basic Mini Sprite not only to look like a '60s Cooper S, but to achieve the performance as well. Far from being a pastiche car, the Checker Marcos Mini — Checker is a Rover dealer in Tokyo — genuinely captures the spirit of a classic Cooper S.

The first look at the interior takes you back 25 years. A Newton Commercial replica trim kit provides authentic blue and gold brocade seat coverings, the central instrument nacelle houses the appropriate 130mph speedometer, and there's an evocative Motalita steering wheel.

On the outside, Marcos resprays the roof in a choice of original contrasting colours, and adds Minilite-type 12ins wheels under flared wheel arches, a replica Mk II Cooper S grille, correct chromed door handles and period 'bullet' wing mirrors. Even the badges look right, although close inspection shows they are

inscribed with the words 'Checker' and 'Marcos' instead of 'Mini' and 'Cooper'.

The real personality transplant has been worked by tuner Richard Longman. The 1275cc engine swallows super unleaded through a pair of SU H4 1in carburettors and a gas-flowed Manifold inlet manifold. A Kent 285 camshaft helps boost top-end power, valves have been enlarged, compression ratio rises to

10.2:1, and there's a twin-box exhaust system.

An estimated 85bhp output means it'll blow away Rover's modern fuel-injected Cooper. The Longman-tuned engine has real muscle, power building strongly from 3000rpm and acceleration is vivid enough to suggest Marcos's estimated 0-60mph in 8.2secs is about right. There's an almighty frenzy under the bonnet as it does so, like a real Cooper S, but a rasping exhaust and the slurp of carburettors add to the time-warp feeling.

You need to stir the four-speed gearbox to keep the motor singing, but the change is sweet and swift. The handling is that famous blend of finesse, accuracy and adjustability. Marcos has seen no need to alter the basic Mini's set-up.

Marcos charges £9498 for this sprint-down Memory Lane. It's a characterful alternative to a Rover Cooper 1.3i for £6995 or to a first-class restored Cooper S for about £8500. More details on 0373 864097.



Checker Marcos: sprint down memory lane for £9498