

Soft Option

When Rover developed and produced the Mini Cabriolet, no doubt it had high hopes for the little convertible. Why then did the car go out of production after only three years? Graham Robson conducts his own inquest.

Here's a brain-teaser for you. Why, after such a short career, was the Rover Mini Cabriolet recently killed off? Was it a commercial failure? If so, how could a major industrial company like Rover spend so long working on ways to keep interest in Minis high, yet produce a distinctive car that didn't sell?

No, I don't understand it either. If producing a convertible version of the Mini was such a good idea, why take 34 years to get round to it? Was it that the numbers had never added up, or that the tooling costs were always too high? Perhaps there was nowhere at Longbridge to build the bodies.

Now, in fact, it's all too late and Rover admits to being highly embarrassed. The nicely-engineered Rover Mini Cabriolet, which went on sale in June 1993, died without an obituary a few weeks ago. How many were made? At the moment, company spokesmen are too embarrassed to say, except that it was probably no more than 300 cars — no, not 300 cars a month, or even 300 cars a year; just 300 in total. I find that amazing.

In the UK alone Rover has 700 dealers — this means that most of the dealerships never sold a single car and probably never even saw one. Even at a new-car price of £11,995 (or £12,586 'on the road' at 1996 levels), Rover must have lost a fortune on the project.

In the beginning, Alec Issigonis's Mini concept was for a tiny runabout; an entry-level saloon without pretensions; a new car which was never meant to be trendy. You and I, and millions of other customers, all disagreed with him, which explains why all



A rare sight indeed, this shimmering topless beauty is one of only an estimated 300 Rover Mini Cabriolets produced.



MINI
cabriolet