



Above. The Cabriolet's running gear was standard Mini Cooper 1.3i — which meant that there was 63 bhp on top and a top speed of around 90 mph.

Left: The Mini Cabriolet was one of those rare convertibles which looked better with the hood up.

Below. Rover used the same wheels as LAMM — namely five-spoke, 12 in, Revolution alloys, shod with 175/70-section tyres.

Everyone, including Rover, agreed that the extra £5000 was a lot to ask for a drop-top conversion, but steady sales looked likely. If all had gone well, therefore, 700-1000 cars should have been sold in the first full year, but it soon became clear that there simply wasn't a big demand.

After the initial batch had been produced, the Cabriolet dropped out of production at Longbridge for months at a time, the final batch of 20 cars being produced this summer. The price remained unchanged in all that time, although the 'on the road' costs were added during 1996.

The whole point of the Cabriolet was that it wasn't run-of-the-mill, it wasn't conventional — but oh my Gawd it was great fun. If it wasn't raining, you could unlatch the hood quickly — two screen-top latches and a single-handed sweep backwards saw to that — and belt off into the sunset.

When you drove one through the streets you always got a lot of attention — especially with the hood folded back, wearing Aviator shades and a trendy cap. Amazingly, the Cabriolet shell felt just as rigid as the saloons. The engine noise actually seemed to dissipate into the open air — there was a lot of extra sound-deadening to help that along — and the special seats were one of the very best features.

No, the Cabriolet was never cheap and, yes, it's going to lose much of its value in the next few years, but how can you put a price on fun, special features and exclusivity? OK, I agree that you could buy one of the surviving Crayford convertibles for a lot less, but where else can you find an open-top Mini Cooper with trim and furnishings like this? Try one if you can. I think you'll be surprised.

As mentioned earlier, the very first Mini convertibles were produced by drop-top specialist Crayford, in Kent. The very first car was seen in 1963 and although this was by no means a coach-built Mini, it featured a soft-top with a Vybak rear window, one-hand hood lowering and sufficient extra chassis strengthening to restore most of the lost torsional stiffness.

These cars featured the original sliding-window passenger doors and the conversion was priced at £129 in 1963. A few years later, Crayford built no



VALUES

Even though the factory-built Cabriolet is very rare, because it is a recent model (the final cars have only just been made), values will continue to fall for years to come. Accordingly, these have had to be listed in the way noted in trade guides. Prices quoted below span good to excellent condition cars:

Registration	Values (August 1996)
1993	£6000-£7000
1994	£7000-£8000
1995	£8000-£9500
1996 models are too rare to list, as yet.	

fewer than 57 drop-tops for Heinz, the food company, as part of a massive promotion. In later years these cars built up a following, a mystique, and there is even a club in existence which caters for the survivors.

Dave Champion of Auto Design in Kent, has been producing convertible Minis to order for more than 10 years.

If you deliver any type of Mini saloon to him at Paddock Wood, he will convert it to a customised convertible in little more than a week.

It can be plain or decorated, with or without special body features — such as flared rear wheelarches. Later models retain contrails around the doors and a Targa bar has been a feature since 1983.

Auto Design told us that its very first convertible was produced in 1980. Eventually it achieved full approval and continuation of the new car warranty from British Leyland.

The brochure states that the car (originally known as a Daly Runabout) appeared at the Earls Court Motorfair in 1982 — which is strange, as there was no Motorfair that year. Research shows that this should read 1981, when conversion to Daly Runabout status cost from £2415 — at a time when Mini saloon prices started at a mere £2899.

Dave now claims to have completed about 1000 Mini conversions to date. His brochure also shows open-air conversions on cars as diverse as the Jaguar XJ-S, the Range Rover and the S-Class Mercedes-Benz saloon.

For further information, call Dave on 01892 836900.

