

# The British Open

Remember 1989, the Mini's 30th anniversary and all that? It was the year that spawned a series of Mini special editions designed to fête this notable landmark. As it transpired, many of them smacked more of desecration than celebration.

Perhaps the Mini Cabriolet is a car born four years too late. It would have been a perfect antidote to the more vulgar offerings of the time. It might still look a trifle silly with the hood down, for it hangs uncomfortably over the rear end of the car, but you can't fault the execution. It's straight from the Mazda MX-5/TVR school of simplicity. It takes no more than a fistful of seconds to lower it, and little more to reverse the process.

It takes up space, but there never was much room to stow things in a Mini.

In short, the whole car is quite beautifully finished. The dash is a tribute to the aes-

thetic benefits of burr walnut veneer when it's used properly and, unusually for a Mini, the radio/cassette is actually sited where the driver can reach it. The sports seats offer far more lateral support than is custo-

mary for Mini owners, and there is a snazzy, user-friendly, leather-bound sports steering wheel. Flared bodywork houses wider five-spoke alloy wheels, and though one or two fit lines are visible, the effect is still both smart and striking.

Traditionalists may blanche at something so 1970s as an *internal* bonnet release catch, though they will doubtless appreciate that there are still a few traditional Mini foibles. The Cabriolet comes with a remote Doppler alarm/immobiliser as standard, but this doesn't actuate the door locks. You still need three separate keys to get in, start and, occasionally, refuel.

Slicing the roof off a Mini wipes out roughly one-quarter of the original article. Rover has compensated with much effective bodily stiffening, as a result of which there is commendably little scuttle shake. It's still there to a degree, but chances are you'll be having too much fun to notice.

The Cabriolet shares the Mini Cooper's fuel-injected, 62 bhp, 1275 engine, though the extra weight clips the edge off its performance. Even so, there's sufficient low-end torque to ensure that the Mini remains supreme amongst small town cars. The problems start, of course, when someone removes buildings and traffic lights from the landscape. That's when you start to notice that it's really rather noisy, that there are

only four gears (even though force of habit means that you inevitably look for an imaginary fifth every so often), and that the ride is, well, Mini-like, though it is perhaps a little better damped than the saloon.

All in all, it's an addictive cocktail, though bean-counters and value-for-money realists will look long and hard at the £12,000 price tag, whereupon the words 'expensive' and 'toy' will doubtless spring to mind.

To be fair, that's exactly what it is. Rear passenger legroom is reduced by the rake of the larger front seats, and the boot can just about accommodate a soft sports bag. It's a Mini with added chic... and reduced practicality (which is something of an achievement in itself).

Looked at objectively, it makes no sense at all.

Fortunately, there are still probably enough folk around who couldn't care less.

Amen for that,

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