

MINI Roadster

By Jim Mc Cauley

How minimalist can a MINI be? The latest version might be the answer as the two-seater Roadster goes on sale. Basically a Coupé with the roof removed, the MINI team has succeeded in producing a compact convertible that has all the requirements to be practical as well as fun.

A strengthened bodyshell is topped by a semi-automatic hood while up front there is a choice of four engines – three petrol and one diesel. Launch choice was the mid-range duo of the Cooper S and Cooper SD entering a market where the competition features cars such as the Mazda MX-5 and Volkswagen Beetle Cabriolet.



Despite its chunky looks, the Roadster retains the appeal of the brand with paintwork finished in contrasting twin stripes running the length of the car. A low rake windscreen and forward leaning roll bars add visual refinement in addition to their practicality. Cabin is familiar MINI as you drop into the driver's seat, and with the hood down and windbreak in place, it provides a snug travelling environment. On winding B roads, the initial feel is one of solidity in the Cooper S with the strengthened shell almost devoid of any flexing and minimal disturbance through the steering. However, while the body on the Cooper SD retains its solidity, there is more flexing through the steering and overall less refinement. But both models retain the legendary MINI roadholding, inspiring confidence and maximising pace. Excellent aerodynamics around the open cabin allow for normal conversation levels to be maintained, while the raised roof helps to subdue outside intrusions only a little. Requiring manual operation to unlock from the upper windscreen edge, the electrically assisted folding operation takes just eight seconds and can be operated at speeds of up to 20 mph. The leading edge of the hood consists of an alloy panel which when folded forms the solid lid for the hood bin. The compact storage solution permits a useful and larger than expected boot of 240 litres which has a central access panel into the cabin. The boot lid also incorporates the active rear spoiler which raises as speeds in excess of 50 mph.



Performance-wise, the Cooper S returns the benchmark 0-62mph in 7.0 seconds compared to the 8.1 seconds of the Cooper SD while the petrol model also has the edge on top speed, its 141 mph bettering that of the diesel by 9 mph. But at the end of the day the winning accolade for the petrol model is its greater refinement, increasing the appeal of the car.

While the Cooper S is listed at £20,905 and the Cooper SD is priced at £21,630, both launch models carried a comprehensive list of extras including the Chili Pack at £1,975 which among other items offers the larger 17-inch alloy wheels (as opposed to the 16-inch standard ones) and wind deflector. Other items on the extras list include leather upholstery at £700 and automatic lights and wipers at £90. On the entertainment front, the Media Pack at £1,120 introduces Bluetooth connectivity, navigation system and 'MINI Connected' which permits a range of Apple and

Blackberry interfaces.

On the environmental and economy fronts, the Cooper S has a CO2 emissions of 139 gms/km and returns 47.1 mpg on the combined cycle, while the Cooper SD emits 118 gms/km with a combined fuel consumption of 62.8 mpg. And further economies can be found in the insurance ratings with the Cooper S sitting eight groups above the Cooper SD which is listed in Group 24E.

Within the range which has seen sales continually rise, the Coupé and new Roadster will remain as niche products, each accounting for less than 10 per cent of total sales. However, it is a market worth addressing, adding to the appeal and charm of the MINI brand.

