

Peugeot RCZ R

By David M Ross

You have to be well on in years to remember the original Mini, launched in 1959 as the Austin Seven and Morris Mini Minor. A delightful and revolutionary little runabout designed to provide cheap, economical transport for four – and some luggage.



Looking back, two features spring to mind, front – wheel drive and a wheel at each corner, the latter enabling the little box to nip around corners with amazing grip and agility. As for the front-wheel drive, with only 37bhp to transmit, there was not enough torque to tug at the steering wheel and even the tiny 10inch wheels had no trouble in coping, so the inherent understeer could easily be kept in check.

But how much power can front-wheel drive cope with? In the sixties, it was thought that around 100bhp, as produced by tuned 1275S Mini Coopers, was about the limit. And as for that other vexing question which queried how much power per litre a passenger car engine could produce while still providing a flexible power delivery, at one time 100bhp was not just the holy grail, it was thought only a race engine could get anywhere near that figure.

But times have changed, as typified by Peugeot's latest version of its RCZ Sports Coupe, the wide wheeled, low slung and very sexy RCZ R.



Described by Peugeot as the most powerful model ever produced by the brand, it's a car that arguably sets a new bunch of benchmarks. Take the power output, a staggering 270bhp, not only enough for a 0-62mph time of under six seconds but generated by just 1.6-litres – admittedly



turbocharged. That's nearly 170bhp per litre, among the best in the world for a production vehicle and already compliant with the Euro 6 emission control standard.

With around 100bhp, the original Mini Cooper S became a hard to tame handful to drive. The tickover was erratic to say the least and the unit only came on-song once the rev counter got past 4,500rpm. Fine for the track or rally stage, hopeless for everyday on-road driving. And with both understeer and torque steer barely controllable, the car became a nightmare to live with.

So BMC did what Peugeot has done, it fitted a limited slip differential. But, while that tamed the wheelspin, it made the torque steer even worse and, without power steering, keeping the tuned Mini in a straight line let alone under control while cornering was near impossible. Thankfully, things have moved on.

In the Peugeot RCZ R they certainly have. Even on a damp race circuit, front wheel turn-in was pin sharp and only when provoked did the power corrupt the wonderfully precise steering. What the engineers at Peugeot Sport have achieved with this car is unbelievable, their motorsport experience blending in superbly with the way the new Torsen limited slip differential stops the power from spinning away.

Peugeot says its RCZ R is a thoroughbred performance car with style and panache, it's a race-bred road-car with phenomenal efficiency and performance and an all-round performer with a pure pedigree. Having driven it on road and track, I would heartily agree with every word. This car, in short, is a sensation.

With a light clutch and a slick change for the six-speed manual gearbox and lovely feed-back from the steering, this is a car that is totally undemanding and remarkably refined. It's engine is velvet smooth and pulls strongly from low revs, full torque being available from 1,900rpm.

After that, the scenery goes into reverse and the strength of the acceleration is awesome. This is a very fast car indeed. So it's happy on-road, even in-town, and on the race track, the latter amazingly so as the suspension, while stiffened over the normal RCZ, soaks up bumps and undulations with

alacrity. With well designed hip-hugging seats, this is also a very comfortable car, well suited to lengthy journeys.

There's not a huge amount of room in the rear but there is some while luggage carrying capacity is not at all bad. A very engaging package, the RCZ R would make for a genuinely fun car to live with, entertaining out on the open road but surprisingly practical in-town.

Especially impressive is the classy interior with its red over stitching and high quality materials along with new sports seats trimmed with a mix of black full grain Nappa leather and Alcantara bearing the R monogram. The exterior lines are set off by a new fixed spoiler which provides extra stability at high speeds and lovely big 19inch wheels through which the big, powerful-looking red callipers with PEUGEOT Sport signature can be clearly seen.

Peugeot hopes to sell around 300 RCZ Rs this year, its problem being that you have to drive this car to be convinced of its awesome abilities. But I think they might well exceed that number once the news gets out that this is a genuinely great car.

With emissions of just 145g/km and a claimed 44.8 mpg on the combined cycle, this beautifully styled and appointed sporting coupe is priced at £31,995.