

CLASSIC DRIVER

MINI Goes Electric



An all-electric MINI is coming to a state near you (as long as it's New York, California or New Jersey, that is). The iconic Oxford-based company will be conducting an extensive consumer trial of an electric version of its 3-door hatch in the USA next year.

Five hundred examples will be delivered to private and corporate consumers in the three states for long-term (a 12-month lease with the option of renewal) evaluation. The cars will look the same as conventional MINIs, but will have just two seats – the rear passenger space taken over by a lithium-ion battery, with a maximum capacity of 35 kilowatt hours. (Based on the car's range, a kilowatt hour translates into 5.4 miles.)

That's enough to transmit energy to the electric motor as direct current, at a nominal 380 volts. The front-mounted electric motor produces 220Nm, and power is delivered to the front wheels via a single-stage helical gearbox. This unique engine and transmission arrangement powers the MINI E to 62mph in 8.5 seconds and on to an electronically limited top speed of 95mph.





When the driver releases the accelerator pedal, the electric motor acts as a generator. This results in braking force; the power recovered from the kinetic energy is then fed back to the battery. Some 75 per cent of all deceleration can be achieved without the brakes, and this energy regeneration feature extends the car's range by up to 20 per cent.

BMW MINI has resisted the temptation to paint the all-new, environment-friendly cars green; the MINI Es will have an exclusive combination of metallic Dark Silver on all panels with a Pure Silver roof. Interchange Yellow highlights the 'plug' motif on the roof, bonnet and door mirrors.



The new cars will be built mostly in Oxford, UK, with the fitment of the drive components and the lithium-ion battery at a specially equipped manufacturing facility situated on BMW plants elsewhere.

Recharging will be done via high-ampere wall units installed in users' garages. These will supply higher amperage than on a normal domestic system and thus provide 'extremely short charging times'.

The new car will be launched at the 2008 Los Angeles Auto Show in November.

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