

CLASSIC DRIVER



MINI Cooper S Convertible

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In the middle of winter, the Classic Driver team defied sub-zero temperatures in the mountains around Villach, Austria, for the first test-drive of the new MINI Cooper S Convertible - and drove top-down for almost the entire two days. The latest MINI slogan - 'Always Open' - challenges you to drive this way all year round. To test your resolve, there's the MINI's much-vaunted 'Openometer' to record exactly how long you've driven with the roof down. As for us, the photographs tell no lies. Honestly, we only put the roof up to test its noise insulation (which was good.)

Factory-built convertible versions of the original, pre-BMW Mini came late in its life, though a few earlier versions were carved from the standard body by independent companies. BMW, however, has brought mass-production to the MINI Convertible, also meeting the strictest safety regulations in the USA. A much wider market is therefore open to the new MINI Convertible.



The modern interpretation of the MINI has moved the concept forward, winning widespread approval, excellent sales figures and high residual values. Three-year-old MINI Convertibles have retained around 70% of their original prices, matching the best German cars. To maintain this success and attract even more sales, the latest MINI Convertible has been carefully revised.



Arriving in Austria, a fleet of mustard-yellow Cooper S Convertibles awaited us at the airfield. Detailed styling improvements were immediately obvious in the colour co-ordination and new handles. Looking deeper, the one-piece rollover protection rises automatically only in life-threatening emergencies. This has permitted a much more stylish, low roofline.



Setting off in freezing weather under a cloudy sky, we pressed the button and the two-stage opening process began - first the sunroof slides back, then the entire top opens up - all at up to 30km/h. With the windbreak up and heated seats on full, we're off and the Cooper S 1.6-litre four-cylinder awakes. Maximum power is 175HP and there's 240Nm of torque available all the way from 1600 to 5000rpm, thanks mainly to twin-scroll turbochargers.



Up in the mountain roads, the MINI has the agility of a hare on the run. The traditional go-kart dynamics of Minis of old are there for the tight corners. A taut chassis, modern suspension and electro-hydraulic power steering make this better than ever, with relaxed comfort available when you back off.



Easy to steer round tight bends, one senses the road on the long, uneven straights. Once you get used to feeling every bump directly through the hands, the genuine go-kart feeling becomes a real pleasure and one appreciates the advanced dynamic stability control (DSC), dynamic traction control (DTC) and electronic limited-slip function of the differential. The DTC was superb on partly snow-covered asphalt, permitting sporty driving with controllable slides.



Driving the MINI in its upper speed range was relaxed but the performance was convincing – S could stand for special sharpness, with 0-100km/h in 7.4sec and a top speed of 222km/h. Astonishingly, we were still comfortable in the winter weather, cruising at 140km/h on a motorway with the top still down. Heated seats and an excellent heating system kept us warm and dry, even when it started snowing heavily – and our ‘Always-open’ tachometer was reading 3hr 29min. We were amazed.



This second-generation MINI Convertible is a highly desirable acquisition for those with at least 22,500 euros for the Cooper or 26,500 euros for the S. The classic character and driving fun remain intact. It will hold its value well. What's different is the comfort and the excellent fuel consumption

for its class. Top marks: it's an open and shut case.

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