

# 2004 MINI:

## DESIGNED FOR FUN



**When BMW reintroduced the British icon a couple of years ago, it retained the original shape but grew the car by about 50% and made it even more functional.** story by Charles Renny

"The MINI is about being different and about having fun," says Les Fenyes, general manager of MINI of Saskatoon. Today's MINI features 16-inch wheels and tires rather than ten. The roof is still roughly level with the door handles of a full sized car, but inside you can fit four adults in acceptable comfort.

Fenyes points out that MINIs can be ordered in three different trim levels: the entry level MINI Cooper, the supercharged MINI Cooper S and the John Cooper Works MINI. In keeping with this sense of fun, you can deck out your MINI in one of several distinctive paint schemes,



wheel types and colours, or put a Union Jack or Maple Leaf Flag on the roof a la Austin Powers and his patriotic Jaguar. Individual striping kits can be added for more personalization.

Each MINI drives quite a bit differently than the others. The basic MINI comes with a 1.6 litre, 115 horsepower inline four while the Cooper S gets the same engine with the addition of a supercharger and an intercooler to pump the power up to 163 horses. A six speed manual is the only gear box available for the Cooper S. With the regular Cooper, a five speed manual is standard or you can order the optional four speed automatic. The John Cooper Works MINI gets the six speed manual, but the engine gets bumped up to 210 horsepower – that will get you from 0 to 100 kph in 7.2 seconds.

"The best drive of the MINI bunch is the John Cooper Works version because no one expects such a small car to perform so well," Fenyes says.

Personally, I haven't driven the JC Works but the Cooper S I drove between Tofino and Nanaimo, B.C. sure embarrassed a Corvette driver. The roads are twisty with lots of blind corners and broken pavement. The longest straight was probably just over 300 metres, but some of the bends were minor and you could actually see what was coming. It was on one of these longer straights that I managed to get by the 'Vette before he noticed and then the quick handling of the MINI kept me out in front. I got far enough ahead in the corners that he couldn't get by me before the next set of corners came up. Talk about putting a grin on my face! Imagine this experience in the John Cooper Works, which is quicker and handles better.

Driving the regular MINI Cooper was just as fun, but in a different way. The test car I drove had the five speed manual and white stripes over a gorgeous blue exterior. Heads turned

no matter where I went. Young, old, kids with licences, kids without – it didn't matter. I knew I had hit the right combination when a crusty Commissionaire set aside his scowl, grinned and gave me a thumbs up. Best of all, the Cooper had enough power to make it fun to drive around town and on the highway, I just had to use the gear lever a bit more than in the Cooper S.

Inside, the MINI sports two comfortable bucket seats up front. The interior is wide enough so that I'm not rubbing shoulders with the front passenger. At the Cooper S level, leather trim and heated seats are optional. In the rear a split folding bench seat can hold two more. If the front seat occupants are a bit long of leg, leg room in the rear will be severely curtailed. By a light compromise in driving position, we were able to fit four in acceptable comfort (keeping in mind that my teenagers always complain about something).

Regular instrumentation is not necessarily driver friendly, as the speedometer is like the original – a

single large dial in the middle of the dash easily seen by wives and others in the car. If you order the navigation package, the speedo' and other instruments are put in two smaller, steering wheel mounted gauges.

The MINI's marketing package is fun too. In fact, this is where Fenyes hits a home run with his MINI Girls. "My MINI Girls are a flashback to a wilder, more open time. They attract attention and have to be able to promote the cars. The MINI is about being outrageous and getting noticed."

And getting noticed is something Fenyes should know. His dealership, MINI of Saskatoon, placed first in Canada and third in a worldwide dealer contest on the knowledge of MINIs.

So, for outrageous fun in a MINI, visit your local dealer and be prepared to have your socks blown off. 🍷

