



MinipassionMini.com

## MEET THE ANCESTORS

While Rover was rediscovering the Cooper in the UK they were also re-launching the South American Mini in Venezuela. *MiniWorld* was lucky enough to get a drive of the rare GRP-bodied Mini Cord

Words: **Monty Watkins** Pictures: **Tony Butler**

**A**s early as the 1960s, Mini was already established as a truly 'world' car. It was being manufactured under licence throughout Europe and as far away as Australia. The typical arrangement would be for BMC or BL to send the car out to the export destination as a CKD kit (completely knocked down) and the local workforce would get some benefit by assembling the car for sale. Destination governments often prefer this kind of arrangement as it reduces the perceived economic damage caused by importation. It also allowed marketing people, stylists, brand managers and dealers to have their say in modifying the Mini to suit the tastes and requirements of the local market. Italy took the concept a long way with the Innocenti hatchback Minis but South America was a quite

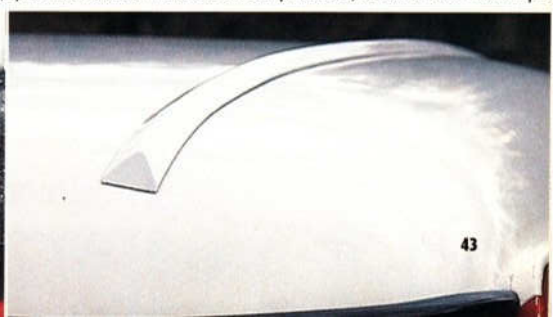
separate departure. Back in the days of Mk1 and Mk2 Mini, Chile struck a deal with BMC to import some Mini components and attach them to their own moulded GRP Mini Mk1 shell. BMC had to agree to the Chilean content of the car or the deal could not have been done. This was identifiably a Mk1 Mini but looking a little more closely would reveal none of the usual external seams, a different bonnet shape and a raised surface along the lower side edges – replacing the usual trim strip. It did have external hinges, sliding windows, Mk1 lights and the moustache grille, but very little is known about the Chilean GRP Mini. Nearly 20 years after the Chile project, Rover negotiated what seems to have been a similar deal with a company called Facorca in Venezuela. This time it used a more modern Mini bodysell and retained some of the traditional



external seams. A prototype was first produced in 1991 and Mini Cord production continued until 1995. We were lucky enough to find a 1992-registered example in the British Motor Industry Heritage Trust Museum at Gaydon. Better still, they let us take it to Chobham and drive it properly - as opposed to a swift spin round the block outside the Gaydon museum. It has a 998cc manual engine/box and servo-assisted brakes, Mini subframes front and rear with dry suspension. There's not much to give it away on the outside... roof-strengthening strips, slightly odd door shut lines, lack of lower seam, lack of seam under the headlamps and, of course, no rust. Inside, the differences are much more appreciable. Familiar Rover three-spoke steering wheel, excellent grey leather seats front and rear, no cubby-hole under the rear seat base, slightly different floorpan shape with suspect carpet fitting, flat grey door trims without side pockets and the inevitable left hand drive. Driving provides the greatest contrast. It feels heavier than a steel shell but, pleasingly, it is much quieter and the GRP seems to deaden a lot of the noise vibration and harshness from the engine bay and suspension mounts. The greater mass seems also to make it a bit smoother than the steel saloon - a bit more like the Traveller or Clubby Estates. Comfort level is one of the best in a standard Mini and comparable to the latest twin-point as a viable driver's environment. A bit posh. But not too ponderous. Single carb 998 is the best of the non-Cooper Mini engines as an all-rounder and it pulls the Cord



A sea of grey inside the Cord but large leather content too. Good, quiet interior. Below left: lots of local parts used, as well as GRP mono-coque



# MINI CORD



along easily. Not as quick as the steel-bodied equivalent but we are not entirely sure of the engine spec for this car. It's a shame it never got a well-sorted 1275 version as that would have been a very capable and comfortable Mini even for relatively long distance driving. 12-inch GB alloys in Minilite style seem to be standard for Cord, and the Pirelli 145/70s fitted to this one struggled to get the car around a fast corner. Rover (mystifyingly) used these Pirellis on some 12-inch wheeled Minis right up to the last, which can only be evidence of a certain sense of humour in the ranks. They are about as close as you can get to the old crossplies but quite manageable and entertaining as they screech through the corners. Rarely could you get a bigger slip angle with radials. Most surprisingly we got a lower level of interior noise than with our own Sputnik Rover Cooper. Fewer rattles, less road noise and the overall impression of great solidness. It is clear that the Venezuelans engineered an excellent version of the Mini for export to their neighbours. We keep hearing rumours of a warehouse full of these Cord bodysells left forgotten somewhere in Caracas. How good it would be to get them back into circulation. We're indebted to Mr Miguel Plano of Colombia for sending us some details about the Mini Cords that were exported to his country from Venezuela. Dates and specifications mentioned here are supplied by Miguel and refer to Colombian Cord literature which he has collected. We did ask for records at Gaydon but, apart from having the car itself, they seem to have none of the associated documents or history.

## MINI CORD

**MiniWorld would like to thank:**  
Mr Ron Whitehead, British Motor Industry Heritage Trust at Gaydon (01926 641188) and Mr Miguel Plano of Colombia

### MINI CORD (COLOMBIAN EXPORT SPEC)

#### Colours

Italian Red, French Blue, Yellow, Blue Metallic, White, British Green, Black  
All the above came with white roof, single body colour by special order

#### 1992 and 1993 models

SB Standard Model  
DB De Luxe Model (air conditioning, grey leather interior, grey leather steering wheel trim, yellow spotlights, line-of-sight instrument binnacle with tachometer, chrome bumpers)

#### 1994 and 1995 models

BA Standard Model  
BX Air conditioned Model  
Cabriolet  
Cooper (Rover Cooper twin-SU conversion kit for 998cc engine, 13-inch Revolution wheels, black leather interior with red stripes, black leather steering wheel trim, Rover Cooper green gauges, yellow spotlights, black bumpers, optional air-conditioning, standard metallic silver paint, optional paint colours)



## CORD

Left: Miguel Plano has kindly sent us some Cord info from Colombia. Far left is the Cabriolet version - an extremely rare Mini. Also bonnet badges, owner's handbook and rear badge.  
Above: 12-inch GB alloys in Minilite style were standard fitment for Cord