

Feisty Mini Cabrio in a world of its own

ROAD TEST

By Berwyn Lewis

BACK in the 1960s, I was a mini-skirted, Mini Cooper-driving, completely superficial and shallow person. I lived in Baker Street, London, opposite Apple, the Beatles' shop and recording studio.

From my window I could see Paul, Ringo, John and George, as well Cilla Black and Twiggy (the super-thin super model) strolling across the street.

I watched them dropping off their laundry into the laundromat next door and springing in and out of their Mini Coopers which all had black-tinted windows, essential for travelling incognito and avoiding fans and paparazzi.

A few weeks later, I bought my first

Mini Cooper, second-hand. I had it fitted with black-tinted windows.

From that moment my life changed. Everyone, everywhere believed I was super-model or a rock star.

Crowds gathered and I was mobbed when I stepped out of my car.

Parking spaces were created for me at all the best discos, such as Sybillas, where I spent many evenings seeing in the dawn with my Carnaby Street-booted feet propped up on a dining table smoking Cuban cigars behind my Mary Quant sunglasses.

Sometimes I was in there for so long that when I went outside I couldn't find my Mini Cooper.

I blame it on the English weather – one time I came out to find a complete change of seasons had taken place – it'd been a sunny twilight when I'd gone in.

When I came outside the world blanketed in snow. My Mini Cooper was buried in a snow drift.

Other times, the locks were frozen, and I had to pour the remains of my vodka or tequila cocktail over the locks to be able to insert the key.

Another time, I stopped at some lights on an icy, steeply-inclined hill in Nottinghill Gate. My Mini Cooper started sliding backwards.

Other, unprintable things also took place in my Mini.

My Mini Cooper and I survived many breakdowns – nervous, marital and mechanical but, sadly, we had to part – I moved up the feeding chain and became really famous (in my own lunch hour), and I had to change countries.

Recently, I was offered the opportunity to test-drive a new Mini Cooper S Cabrio. I was shocked at the difference. Life suddenly took on a new meaning.

Talk about squirry, feisty action – the sporty seats, leather-wrapped steering wheel, push-button, sliding roof, power windows, cruise control, the Xenon (I thought that was the name of a

hairdresser) headlights.

And so much information – temperature, fuel range, navigation displays, wind, fog, ice, rain and anti dazzle sensors.

This car does all the thinking, unlike its ancestor from the 1960s. It's highly intelligent. Typically, Mini has 2415 components.

This machine is no go-kart. It goes where no man or woman dared to go

back in the '60s and at 20 times the speed, but what do you expect? It was built by 230 robots.

As for the windows, they're not tinted these days. Everyone's a star and everyone can see everyone else, including me, just another shameless, attention-seeker at the lights.

■ Dealer: Sylvania MINI, Sylvania; telephone 9522 5000.



Test The author Berwyn Lewis road-testing the latest Mini Cooper S Cabrio.