



A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME

By Geoff Wheatley

In the fall of 1959, a rather strange looking front wheel drive car was presented to the British public. Its first attraction was the claim that the car would give the driver in excess of 40 miles to the gallon, also that its 850 cc engine required no special attention apart from an oil change every 4000 miles. It could carry four grown individuals in modest comfort and if pushed you could squeeze a couple of young-sters in as well. There was even a boot that would take a decent size load assuming that you were not going on a sea voyage for a month and for a few extra bucks a heater and radio could be fitted. Of course I am talking about the Morris Mini Minor Mark One that was offered to the motoring world for approximately, based on the current exchange rate, \$800.00. Not quite the cheapest car at that time but close!

Its introduction did not create a rush to buy in fact the total sales for the next twelve months was just over a 100,000 units, the public were still unsure about this car and its safety features. However the swinging sixties certainly helped to create the Mini as a fashion icon confirmed when a woman's fashion item was named after the car. Increased engine power, a great movie based on a billion dollar hoist, international rally success and a fuel crisis kept the Mini in the public eye and in the family garage.



When the car was first introduced the vast majority of car owners simply had the family car that Dad used to earn the daily bread and the family enjoyed at the weekends but things were changing and the two car family was becoming the order of the day. What better second car than the Mini. Big enough to take the kids to school pick up the groceries and even do some serious shopping all at the same time. Like the classic Austin Seven of prewar years the Mini set a new fashion in personal transport and created a market that simply grew as other manufacturers started to copy the concept of a practical modern "Mini Car". The most obvious was the introduction of the Hillman Imp offered to the public in 1963 at the barging price of, again at the current exchange rate, \$837.00. (By now the Mini had moved up the price scale to around \$930.00 but had a few extra trinkets to justify this increase.)



The Hillman Imp deluxe

The Imp was at best a modest try to be competitive with the Mini but suffered like other British cars from a lack of quality control. It did have an aluminum power unit that could be difficult to work on by the average owner but with the right tuning gave the car an edge when it came to competitive racing or rally work. Any owner sitting at the stop lights could secretly pretend he was Sterling Moss! Such was the anticipation of record sales that the Hillman Company built a new factory in Scotland staffed with inexperienced workers which may well have contributed to the production problems with this car.

In 1969 the Mini increased in size with the introduction of the Clubman Estate priced at just over \$1200 and about 22% larger than the standard version. Engine size was now up to 1100 cc but it still gave around 36 miles to the gallon and could cruise at 65 all day. It is interesting to note that the MGB Spots car selling at the same time as the Mini utilizing a 1800 cc power unit had a lower performance ratio to engine size especially when it came to competitive activity and there were other British sports cars that suffered the same fate, faced with a tuned Mini they were not impressive.

Twice between 1960 and 1990 British Leyland and later Rover tried to end the production of the Mini but both times the public demanded that the car continued to be produced despite the fact that the design etc., was now entering into its golden years. When BMW in its wisdom purchased Rover everyone was convinced that the Mini days were over.

A new MG was in the pipeline, the Rover Company seemed ready to enter a new era with the mighty BMW Company supporting such development. The announcement came, Mini production would be phased out over an eighteen month period, and the writing was on the wall, so we all thought!

As the old Mini faded into history a new modern Mini took its place almost the same shape certainly designed for the same market and as modern as anyone could ever wish for. OK so it's a touch larger in fact it's more than a touch, and it feels more like a real car with comfort thrown in but still a winner as the sales figures for the first year indicated. Production could hardly keep up with the demand and it's much the same today. Is it truly a Mini remembering the 1959 car that none expected to last over thirty years? Of course it is once a Mini always a Mini, remember a Rose of any other name is still a rose!