



GLOBETROTTER



In 1968 John and Carys Pollard drove this Mini from London to India, through the Middle East. 31 years later they returned in the same Mini, via Malaysia, China, Mongolia and Siberia.

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Photos by Craig Watson
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It's often said don't judge a book by its cover, and first glance at this Mini doesn't give any idea of the extraordinary life that it's led.

Do you fancy driving across the country? How about across the globe? Could you consider doing it twice – thirty years apart and in the same car? What if that car was a Mini? If you still answer yes, then you may be of the same mettle as John and Carys Pollard from Sydney.

John bought his Morris Mini Traveller (UK reg AYW 551B) brand new, upon his arrival in England in 1964. Just a few days later he and an old school friend headed across to France for a whirlwind tour of the WWI battle grounds, then South to Italy, and back through Switzerland, Germany and Holland. The dye was cast and John was hooked on travelling in the Mini.

Over the next couple of years, while studying at Cambridge, John and a number of friends made various journeys across the continent in the Mini, including through East Germany and twice to Moscow.

While at Cambridge he also met and married Carys. After John finished his studies, the couple set off on a six-week tour of Western Europe – Carys' first taste of camping.

During the next year, while working at the University of Chicago in the US, the couple



Lunch near Hohenschwangau Castle, Germany - August 1967

was intrigued with tales of overland journeys from England to India, and spent a great deal of time planning such a trip.

Meanwhile, the Mini remained behind in Wales, up on bricks in a barn.

Upon their return to England, final arrangements were made, including a shopping spree that the couple recount in the book of their journeys, *Don't kiss me – its very terrible*. "...we loaded the Mini with provisions for three months, purchased during a single shopping spree. We bought an absurd amount of canned food, a ridiculously large carton of Lyle and Tate sugar cubes, rolls

and rolls of toilet paper, more than a dozen cans of butter, innumerable cans of ham and spam, and many other items...And, of course, we put together what we thought was an appropriate first-aid/medical kit."

They were then ready for a 20,000+km run across Europe and the sub-continent. "Confident that the Mini was in very good mechanical condition our spares comprised only three tyres, but in the light of John's Soviet Union experience, we had all the tyres fitted with tubes."

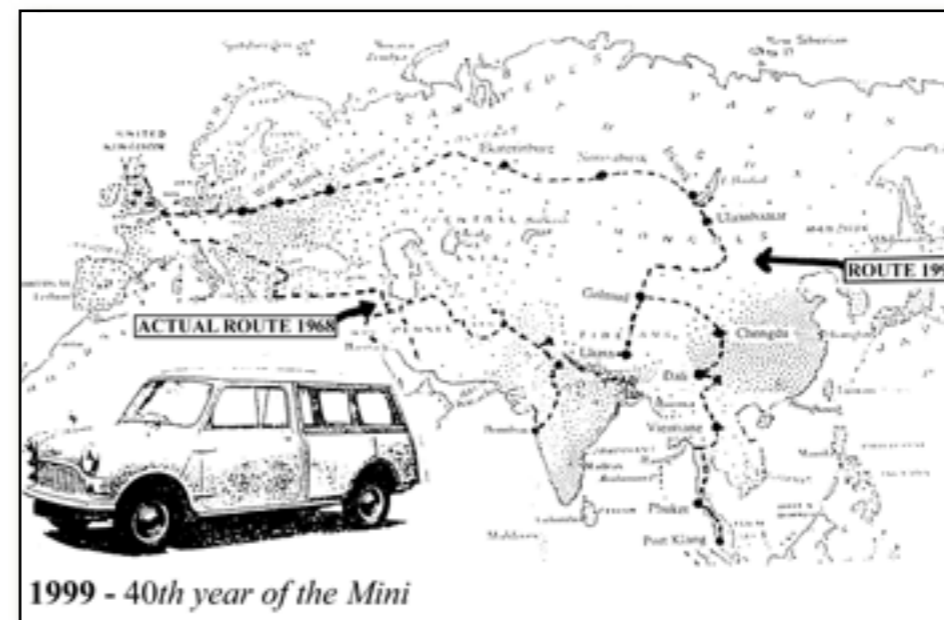
On 1 August 1968, they set off for a three month adventure, which took them over 13,026 miles through Western and Southern Europe, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

While the trip was a great success and without major incident, their main regret was being unable to gain permission to enter Tibet from India. Tibet would have to wait 30 years for their return.

After arriving in Sydney and setting up home, John took up an appointment with Macquarie University. He drove the Mini to work every day, and 30 years later continues to do so, as he explained recently. "I've driven it to work virtually every day of my life. I still drive it every day. Of course, we've had a bigger car as well for most of the time, so it does a modest distance every year."



The road to Bamian, Afghanistan - 1st overland trip, 1968



Route map was on a postcard the couple sent from all over the World.

However, The Mini still undertook a few trips around the countryside, as John recalled. "We had a family holiday in 1973, with the two of us and the two eldest children, who were still youngsters then, and Carys was seven months pregnant with number three. We went to Melbourne then crossed over to Devonport, took the car around Tasmania, bought an old wall clock and a padre's portable organ, and brought those back. When we were camping beside the Murrumbidgee, the other campers were astounded to see what came out of the vehicle."

Although all the early trips and the first overland journey had been accomplished with the original 850cc engine, the Mini now runs an 1100cc unit, as John continues. "The first time I had the engine redone I waited to have the original engine re-bored and everything, and that took weeks. So the next time around I just took an exchange engine, and that's happened a couple of times. I don't know how many I've had now. And then we moved up to the 1100, and that certainly gave it a bit more power for some of the journeys."

John said the 850 engine had coped well with the overland adventure. "There were only the two of us in the car the whole time, except when we had other people guiding us and they hopped in the cabin with us. The worst problem was it tended to overheat. I can think of a couple of particular instances in Turkey and Iran, where the engine overheated, and I'd removed the thermostat completely, trying to make the flow as free as

it could be. They're prone to that, they're not designed for the really hot conditions."

In 1997, and with long service leave for 30 years' continuous work at the university approaching, John and Carys got the inspiration to do a return overland journey. This time, due partly to the political turmoil in the Middle East and partly to the desire to try something new, they planned to travel via Malaysia, China, Mongolia and Siberia, before driving right across Russia and Europe.

This time nearly two years' planning was required, particularly with organising the Chinese section. Three months before their planned departure, they told their friends of their plans. "Their reactions were varied. Most seemed to think we were crazy, but others said 'Go for it! It will be the adventure of a lifetime...' John's closest friend of more than 45 years was particularly concerned, and mentioned two patients of a medical colleague who had simply disappeared in Thailand. We tried to persuade all of our sanity and thorough planning, although the frequent press reports of dangers in Russia and elsewhere worried us."



Fan belt repairs - Thailand 1999



So, they departed Sydney in the 40th year of the Mini (a happy coincidence) and flew into Kuala Lumpur, where they would meet the Mini off a ship from home. Then began an amazing odyssey through some of the most remote and rugged terrain accessible by vehicles – all with front-wheel-drive and four inches' ground clearance.

From the beginning, the plan had included a 2,500km detour into Tibet from China. It was during this part of the journey they encountered so many obstacles, Carys declared she had a title for any book of their trip, as she recalled. "I said to John, we've got to call this chapter, my walking tour of China, because I think the guide and I spent more time out of the car, than in it. When we were pushing the car, or just guiding John between rocks and whatever other obstacles that were in the way."

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In front of Potala Palace, Tibet

