

**THE
IMMIGRANT**
★



Although not a major success in Europe, LRX 828E came to Australia and became a star.

Words by Craig Watson
Photos by Autopics and Craig Watson

Few people have been privileged to drive genuine Works Minis. Fewer still have been in the enviable position of owning one. Graeme Urch has owned his for more than 30 years.

He's rallied it, used it as a daily driver and has now completely restored it. Today, it is probably one of the most original ex-Works rally Minis outside of the BMIHT museum at Gaydon, in the UK.

As explained in the previous story, BMC Australia, under the guidance of PR Manager Evan Green, imported two Works-built rally cars for the 1967 Southern Cross Rally. Their English registrations were LRX 829E (described briefly on the previous pages) and this one, LRX 828E.

According to the British Motor Industry Heritage Trust, LRX 828E, chassis number CA2S7 956612, an Austin Cooper S in Tartan Red with black roof, was built on 18 January 1967, and despatched shortly afterwards to the BMC Competitions Department (usually referred to as the Works rally team, or simply, the Works) at the MG Car Company, Abingdon. According to the records, it was fitted with a fresh-air heater and an oil cooler.

Now, according to the BMIHT Chief Archivist, Richard Brotherton, there was a list of Works cars, and all sorts of related information, compiled by his predecessor Anders Clausanger. Some of this information has never been published, in order to have some



Rauno Aaltonen & Henry Liddon in the 1967 Acropolis Rally - Photo by BMIHT

safeguard against people attempting to build fake cars and pass them off as legitimate.

Richard did some digging up for us, but we weren't the least bit surprised when everything we believed about Graeme's Mini was confirmed by these files.

You see, Graeme has done a remarkable amount of research on the car, and successfully took on a pretender to the identity of his Mini.

At Abingdon, the car was completely transformed to the exacting standards demanded

by BMC's high-profile rally drivers, alongside LRX 827E, LRX 829E and LRX 830E. While at Abingdon the car was fitted with special seats, harness seat belts, dual electric fuel pumps, extra gauges and switches, Halda rally meters, map lights, driving lights, reversing lights, quick-lift jacking points, super-strong sump guard, special relays and countless other special goodies.

It also received a coat of Old English White paint over the roof, part of the official Works colour scheme. A full list of modifications, too numerous to mention here, can



Paddy Hopkirk and Garry Chapman in the 1967 Southern Cross Rally

be found in Peter Browning's book, *The illustrated history of the Works Minis* (ISBN 0-85429-967-X). Although now out of print, you may find a copy in your capitol city library.

Most importantly though, was the heart of the rally car – the Works engine. 1293cc, about 90 bhp, twin H4 SU carburetors with tuned inlet trumpets, tuned extractors, high-compression competition cylinder head and AEA 648 camshaft, were complimented by close-ratio gearbox and 4.2:1 differential, with Hardy-Spicer universal joints.

In 1967 the Works mechanics had around twenty Minis under their care. To ensure there were always fresh cars available they were on a roster, being serviced, repaired or upgraded between rallies, while others would take their place. So, 827E (Timo Makinen/Paul Easter) and 829E (Rauno Aaltonen/Henry Liddon) had their rally debut on 1 April 1967 in the Tulip Rally (Holland), finishing second and third outright.

828E (Aaltonen/Liddon) and 830E (Paddy Hopkirk/Ron Crellin) had their debut the following month in the Acropolis Rally

(Greece). Unfortunately, Rauno had an accident with a non-competing car on a special stage and retired from the event, while Paddy was first outright after a fabulous run.

Both these events were also contested by older Works cars – GRX 5D in the Tulip and GRX 195D in the Acropolis – but both cars retired.

June was again the turn of the odd-numbered cars, in the Geneva Rally (France/Switzerland), with 829E (Tony Fall/Mike Wood) winning the event, just ahead of 827E (Julien Varnaev/Liddon).

As is usually the case, because of the amount of damage sustained in the crash in Greece, 828E was re-bodied and the identity switched to the new car. It was ready for its July run in the Danube Rally (Austria/Hungary) but, while leading the rally, the car was barred from entering Hungary and was disqualified from the event. It seems that in a mix-up, Rauno was without the appropriate entry Visa (or his Visa may have expired) and he was unable to cross the border!

It was around this time that Evan Green put in his order for two Works cars to contest the 1967 Southern Cross Rally and BMC Australia was sold 828E and 829E. The cars were given a complete freshen-up back at Abingdon, then despatched to Sydney in late August or early September to arrive in time for the Rothmans International Car Rally (aka The Southern Cross) in October.

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Rauno Aaltonen was reunited with LRX 828E at the 2002 Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne



Evan Green and George Shephard in the 1968 Southern Cross Rally



Graeme Urch & Rauno - 2002 AGP