



## A Foregone Conclusion

1966 was the first year of decimal currency, and with it came a new class structure and a new sponsor. Classes were still divided by price, being: Class A up to \$1,800; Class B \$1,801 to \$2,040; Class C \$2,041 to \$2,700; and Class D \$2,701 to \$4,000.

However, according to Bob Holden recently, the prize money was effectively halved. "It was at the time that we changed from pounds to dollars and they didn't double it or anything, they just changed the sign from pounds to dollars, so effectively we only won half what they'd won the year before."

"The bad bit was the total prize money was \$750, which was split six ways (see Rauno Aaltonen's letter), so between us we only got \$125 each."

As a direct result of the Cortina GT500, the minimum number of cars required to qualify was increased to 250. Harry Firth planned a Mk2 version of the 500, but Ford wasn't interested, particularly after losing a fair bag of money on the cars in '65. Besides, they already had something bigger, better and faster planned for the future.

As Bathurst approached in 1966 there was only one real contender, the 1275cc Cooper S, and just about everybody knew it. Minis continued to dominate motorsport in Europe, winning just about every major rally and touring car event.

In Australia they were always hounding the bigger cars, with regular outright wins. Of



Paddy Hopkirk with BMC's Evan Green

the 53 cars that started at Bathurst in 1966 nearly half the field, 24 cars, were Minis.

With no official Ford entry, and no production Ford realistically in the running, there were some interesting drivers in a Cooper S for the first time.

Most notably was Harry Firth, who had masterminded Ford's "creative rule interpretations" the previous year. But also piloting Minis in a one-off appearance were Bruce McPhee/Barry Mulholland, Barry Seton/Barry Arentz, Frank Matich/Frank Demuth, and Doug Chivas Jnr (partnering his father Doug who had been in a Cooper S in '65).

BMC again had a full contingent and three-car team. Three international drivers were originally planned, but when Timo Makinen had to withdraw due to rally commitments in Europe, the two that came out were Paddy Hopkirk, who paired with Brian Foley, and Rauno Aaltonen, driving with Bob Holden. Timo's proposed partner was John French, who was teamed with another local, Steve Harvey.

Of the nineteen cars entered in Class C, seventeen were Cooper S. Their only likely competition was from the V8 Valiants and a lone Holden X2 (a twin-carb sports version of the HR) in Class D. It was basically a question of which Mini would win.

The three BMC-entered cars were hand-built by the apprentices at the Zetland factory, and while they were properly built, there was still more that could be done.

By partnering Bob Holden with Rauno Aaltonen, BMC may not have realized it but they had given themselves a major advantage.



The three BMC factory team Minis arrive at the track. Pic courtesy Bob Holden.



Ern Abbott partnered Harry Firth in a Cooper S to sixth outright

While the others were all exceptional drivers, Holden was the only one on the team who was also a mechanic. He had been building, racing and rallying Minis since late 1964 and through his rallying had become good friends with Evan Green.

He'd also won the confidence of one of the BMC apprentices, David Bradford, as Bob revealed. "When I got involved with the rally team, one of the kids' perks was to go in one of the rally car's service teams for the weekend, and David attached himself to me because I was the only one of the drivers who was a mechanic... We'd been rallying the previous week, and Dave rang me up on the Monday morning and said, 'you've got a bit of a problem... they've just had the three cars on the dyno and one of them is down on horsepower on the other two, and you know which one you're getting, don't you?'"

"That's when I managed to con Evan into letting us have the car. So I took it home and went and organized the boys at Lynx to be on standby that night. Dave came to the



The Aaltonen/Holden Cooper S heads over the top of Mt Panorama, on its way to winning the 1966 Gallaher 500 outright.

workshop and organised my guys, because they weren't that much into Minis. I arrived back up there after dark and stripped the motor and we balanced and checked everything on the whole car, even the gearbox came apart and the gears got balanced, the hubs got balanced, all the wheel bearings, brake discs were balanced. All things that not many people had done before, certainly the things hadn't been done in the apprentices' workshop, because people didn't do those sort of things."



John French leads Brian Foley through The Esses early in the race.

"I was just looking for an edge, and the edge happened to be that it had to be as perfect a car as you could possibly get. I knew they weren't really that perfect. They were nicely-built little cars, but they weren't on the edge, the limiting edge of being perfect."

"So that's what we did. We balanced everything that went around... What had all been done at the factory was pretty well spot on, but the balancing was the critical thing on them. So we got it back from Lynx, put it back together, drove it into the factory in the dark and parked it. The next night I got it again and drove it from Sydney to Yass, to Canberra and back, absolutely flat out, to run it in and out and everything else."

While Bob was himself one of the top ten or so drivers in the ATCC at the time, he said the other deciding factor was having Rauno as his co-driver. "Rauno was Rauno, he was special. I wanted him right from when they said he was coming. I knew he had done sportscar racing and things like that as well. He was a feeling driver. He could carry a car. He was unbelievable, that's why we did so well. But I had no choice anyway... because in team order Rauno was number three and I was number three, the other two were more important than us, so we were teamed together."

Bob said that had their car been fastest in practice they probably would have had it taken off them for one of the other teams, but Rauno took some convincing not to put his best laps in for practice. "I had to con Rauno, and it took some doing, to not do full laps. In those days you could see the tower (at McPhillamy Park) from the pits, and you could see the cars going over the hill. So we'd time from there to there. We'd do a slow half lap, then a flying half lap. We worked it out somehow, Rauno got all technical and worked it out."

If you would like to read the rest of this story and see how the Minis fared at Bathurst, between 1963 and 1976, then grab your copy of The Mini Experience from your local newsagent, or subscribe today.



Father-son team of Doug Chivas/Doug Chivas Jnr. were second in Class B.