

# The Collectors

## Collection Under Construction

Words and photos by Craig Watson



Having one of every type of Cooper is a dream for many. Rodger Howard is well on his way to achieving that dream.

Rodger's interest in Minis goes back to when he was a young boy and his parents had a Mini Van. "They had that as their work vehicle and it had a great big mechanical speedo on the roof of it. I think it was actually a purple car with yellow writing, Howard Instruments on it and everything."

However, Rodger didn't get interested in Minis himself until much later. In 1996, he bought a 1970 van, similar to his parents'. "I remember driving it up to an event near Melbourne, and it rained so hard that the water was squelching in through the shock absorber towers in the back of the van."

He moved to Melbourne the following year, to open a branch of the family business, and took the Mini with him. "I met Henry Draper (former owner of Northern Mini Parts in Heidelberg) when I came to Melbourne and I decided I wanted to have a Mini sedan, so I bought the blue car. It was in a very sad state of affairs at the time. It had an A+ engine in it, not the original Mk2 engine, and so forth. I got a Mk2 engine and did it up, the guys at A Grade Panels painted it, and they did a



Rodger with his three completed Minis: race, road and rally spec.

really good job. It's a nice straight job and it's lasted really well."

"It's a nice car and it goes very well, but we probably went overboard at the time. It had to have the fastest engine; it's basically a Group N engine with lower compression, so it's a pig on the road. My wife Miyuki doesn't like riding in it because the Weber is noisy and so forth, so I've got a set of twin 1.5" SU's, I'll put a milder cam in it and basically make it more like a Mk2 S police car."

Rodger became involved with racing fairly soon after coming to Melbourne. The red car is his Group N racer (built and still maintained by Barry Devlin), and he's had plenty of adventures in that, including racing at Bathurst in 2002. "That was one of my life challenges, to go up and have a crack at Bathurst. The Minis have been a tool to be able to go and do all these things, to go to Bathurst and to run in a whole lot of different events, do Targa Tasmania, to go to Japan and race (see page 28). It's been the catalyst for all those sort of things, and it's fantastic."

He describes the Group N car as being "a 1964 model, because every Group N Mini is 1964", but explains, "it's all Mk1 Cooper S bits and pieces".

The third car here is Rodger's Targa Tasmania car, and it is definitely the real McCoy, a 1963 Morris 997cc Cooper. "I built it in 2001-2002. When we looked at the handicap initially, we found that to build a 997 Cooper, in standard trim, was the thing to do. Unfortunately, once we built the thing we found they had changed the goal posts in terms of time."

Rodger bought the car from Ken Stockton as a Group N racer, with 1275cc engine and all the usual bits, but a full restoration was required to bring it back to standard. "I ran it once as a 1275 at Winton. Then it was a bare-shell restoration, using mainly rare parts from Henry's private collection.

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Valtain rims on road car weigh just 1.9kg



Left to right: 1275cc Group N racer, 997 Cooper Targa car, 1275cc Mk2 Cooper S road car.