

# Dark Magic



## Give credit where it's due...

A little over ten years ago I was at the Melbourne International Motor Show, to see Porsche's revolutionary Tiptronic automatic, with the "unique" ability to select gears manually. I mentioned to one bystander that the Mini had such a feature back in 1968. He looked at me as if I had just announced that the World was, in fact, flat.

When I decided to do this feature on the history of the Mini-Matic (as the car was known in Australia) I had no idea that tracking down information would be so difficult. So little has been published about the automatic used in the Mini, from experts or enthusiasts.

This is compounded by a fair amount of misinformation – I suggest due mainly to ignorance of the automatic Mini – that can be found. For example, the well-respected Internet motoring resource, *Autozine*, claims Porsche's Tiptronic was "the earliest semi-automatic transmission offered by a major car maker". Porsche's official website claims; "Porsche pioneered Tiptronic, and suddenly there was a versatile alternative to the either/or choice that sports car buyers faced in selecting a transmission type. The Tiptronic option combined the ease of an automatic (with) the engagement of manual gearshifts."

I don't want to discredit Porsche for their excellent design, but to give credit where it is due for the World's first full-automatic, with fully-manual selection of gears available.

Here, then, is the story of the Mini with "Automated Stick Shift", as near as I can uncover it. As always, I would be pleased to hear from anyone who can add to the story.

Mention the Mini's automatic transmission to most mechanics and they might simply give you a blank stare, or run away screaming. But there are some who believe it is a magical wonder of technology, that was maligned and ill-deserving of its poor reputation.

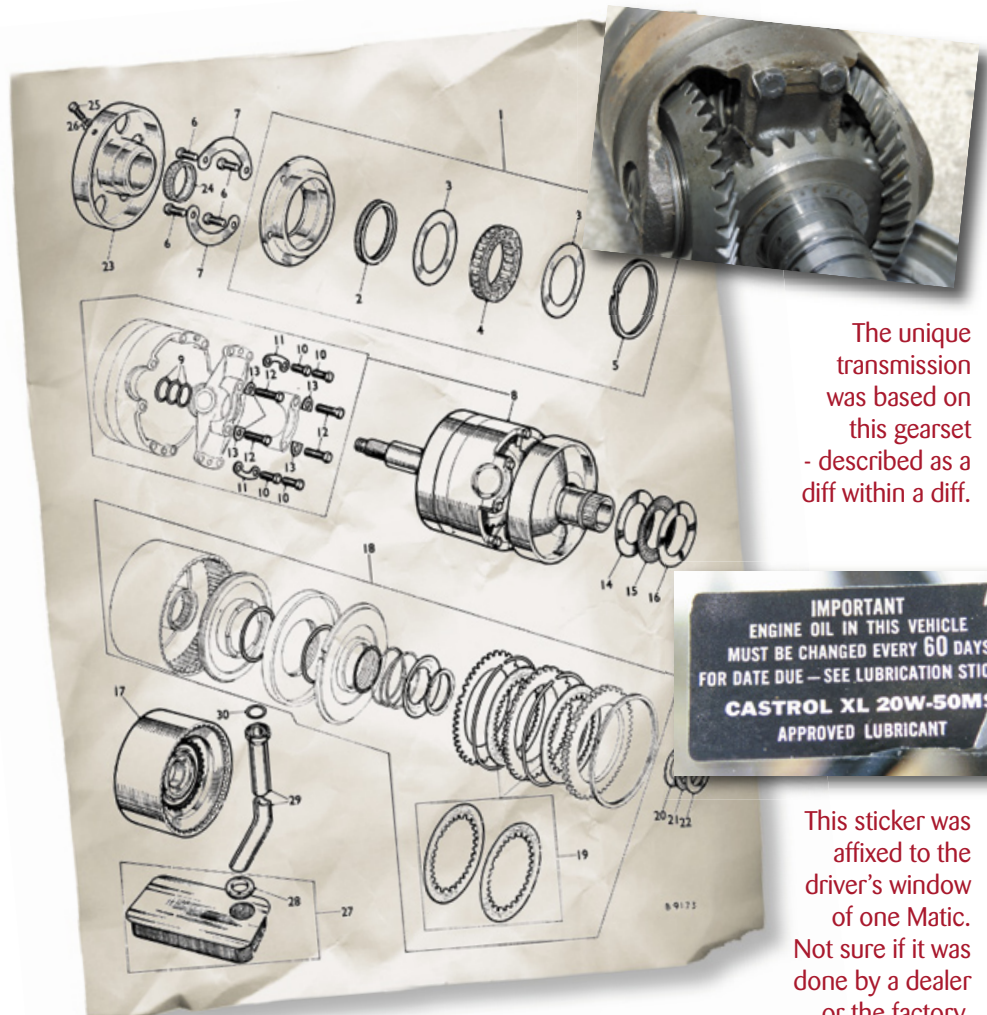
If you've ever driven a good Matic, as we will refer to it, you will understand how marvellous they can be. But it is a transmission that requires religious maintenance and special knowledge to keep it in fine fettle.

The earliest details in Australia of the automatic Mini, were from the UK correspondent for Australian magazine *Modern Motor*, in December 1965. "Alex [sic] Issigonis, the BMC design genius, threatened during the introduction of the Austin 1800 last year: 'We'll have automatics on the Minis inside 12 months, and they'll be little beauties'"

"Well, the automatics have arrived (in Britain, at any rate; Australia must wait)", he continued, "and Alex is absolutely right. I know. I've just spent 60 rapid miles, driving both Minis and 1100s equipped with the new four-speed 'his-and-hers' transmission – and 'little beauties' just about sums it up."

At least he was honest enough to admit when they had missed the call on the automatic Mini, stating; "when *Modern Motor* in May predicted automatic Minis before the end of the year, we suggested that an electrical system was the likely choice. My, oh my – how wrong we all were!"

If you would like to read the rest of this story, grab your copy of *The Mini Experience* from your local newsagent, or subscribe today.



The unique transmission was based on this gearset - described as a diff within a diff.

This sticker was affixed to the driver's window of one Matic. Not sure if it was done by a dealer or the factory.