



The NEW

Words and photos by Craig Watson.

The second generation new MINI has been released, and it won't disappoint anybody who test-drives it.

The official media launch for the new MINI was held recently in Tasmania, with journalists given a couple of hours to sample each variety. We each got the chance to passenger and drive in each of the Cooper and Cooper S models, and the general impression was overwhelmingly positive.

At first glance the new MINI isn't that much different from the previous model, but look more closely and you will see a vast array of changes. In fact, although the design has stayed faithful to the previous model, there is barely a component, and not one body panel, that has been left unchanged. It is what MINI call Revolutionary Evolution.

With new engines, new transmissions, body panels, interior, and suspension and new accessories, this really is an entirely new car.

Which begs the question of what to call it. MINI has followed the BMW practice of referring to the model range by the design nomenclature. The first generation was the R50, the cabrio range the R53, and the new model range is the R56.

That is at odds with traditional English practice of naming the cars according to the sequence or series of the base model – Series, Mk, etc. While the original 1959 Mini was designed under the ADO15 code, the car was rarely referred to by that title. Even when the ADO20 came out, it was always referred to as the Mk3 Mini.

So, should we be calling this new car the R56, as MINI would prefer, the Series 2, or the Gen2 (as in second generation) as I have suggested in the past, or something else? Do we call this car the new MINI, which the previous one was, or the new new MINI – just confusing?

I'd be very interested in the thoughts of our readers on this, but for the moment I'll go along with MINI and call it the R56.



Differences between R50 (silver) and R56 (blue) are subtle, but are over the whole car.

So, back to the launch.

After being whisked off to sunny Hobart, wined, dined and breakfasted, we were given the keys to a bunch of MINIs, a route map and instructions, and set loose on the wilds of Southern Tasmania. We were also given a curious parcel, which, when investigated, turned out to be a barf bag (no polite way of putting it really) for passengers.

It was good to see the Classic Mini, and the Mini Car Club of Tasmania, being involved in the launch. Following dinner, about a dozen Minis from the MCCT arrived to ferry us to our hotel. Members of the club got a chance to look over, sit in and investigate the new cars, and all seemed to be quite impressed.

Receiving the keys for the new cars in the morning produced a surprise. The key itself sits inside an electronic key, which is in turn pushed into a slot on the dash. The key is then pushed in further to activate power, and a start/stop button is pushed to start the engine. The same button is pushed to stop the engine when required.

This was the first of many electronic gadgets found throughout the car, many of which take quite a bit of getting used to, but which should all become second-nature to use once this has been achieved.

For example, the indicator switch (on the left of the steering column in European style, as it was on the previous model) does not stay up or down when activated. It is one push to activate the indicator, and another click in the opposite direction to turn it off. Quite a few times I found myself indicating left, then right, then left again in an effort to turn it off after changing lanes. Cancellation after turning a corner is as per normal.

The interior has been completely redesigned, though retaining most of the readily identifiable elements of the R50. The most prominent change is the larger, centrally-mounted speedo. MINI has spent a great deal of effort in getting this feature approved for Australian models. The tach, standard on all Aussie-delivered MINIs, sits on the steering column, and is slightly larger than that on the R50. There is also a very clear digital speed readout in the centre of the tach.

The irony is that neither my co-driver, Mark Hanna from Fast Fours magazine, nor I used the central speedo, as the digital speedo is perfectly positioned and easy to read.

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Mini Club of Tas taxis arriving.



Club members get a peek at new MINI.



C'mon mate, get a move on!