



Mystery Machines

- 1969 Cooper S



Words and photos by Craig Watson.

The Mk II Australian Minis were released in June 1969, but there remains plenty of confusion surrounding the first six months of production.

To understand this, regarding the Cooper S in particular, we need to look at the reasons behind the release of the MkII and the many differences between those made in England, and those manufactured locally.

The Mk II Mini was released in the UK in October 1967, and was a compromise between updating the existing car and cutting costs. Although it had undergone a large number of running changes since its birth in 1959, the Mk I Mini of 1967 looked little different from its predecessors.

As the car neared its tenth year of production, BMC was faced with a dilemma. Most car companies would have had a major reworking of their complete range within a ten-year period, in order to maintain a fresh and modern appearance to the market.

However, BMC was in financial trouble, and was simply unable to afford major re-tooling for the Mini. According to Graham Robson, in *MINI – A Celebration*; “In 1965, BMC’s profit (after tax) was £16.3 million, in 1966 it was £15.1 million, but in 1967 it fell to only £3.9 million. Although BMC put a brave face on those figures, the fact is that they were inadequate.”

The Mini still sold around 230,000 units in 1967, and would not peak for another four years. The development of ADO 20, the updated replacement for the ADO 15 Mini, had already begun, and was scheduled for introduction by the end of the decade.

However, it was felt that the age of the existing design would hinder sales, and that a face-lift was needed in the short term.

Despite the Minis sales success, it was never a large profit-maker for BMC – with many claiming even today that it was basically a loss-maker. We will look into this in more detail in future issues of this magazine.

It was therefore felt that the Mini should get an update wherever possible, without any major expense, but that costs should also be cut wherever possible – without detracting from the more-modern feel of the car.

Released in October 1967, the Mk II Minis featured a revised and larger grille, slightly larger rear window, double-skinned bootlid, larger and re-designed taillights, and new badges. Cost-cutting meant rationalisation across the range, including discontinuing the bumper corner bars on the Super de Luxe and Cooper models.

Morris and Austin Cooper S also shared the same grille, although base models in each marque retained individual styles of grille.

While it was originally announced that the Mk II Minis would include a new full-synchromesh gearbox, this wasn’t available until late in 1968.

Two main factors meant the Australian Mk II Minis would be considerably different from their UK counterparts.

Firstly, local content. The Australian Local Content Programme meant that from 1964 body shells were pressed locally, on UK-sourced but locally-developed tooling. BMC Australia had made a number of changes in

the tooling, in particular the floor pressing – which incorporated channels for hydro pipes, covered by protective plates.

All Australian Minis, from March 1965-on, incorporated locally-designed wind-up windows with quarter-vents – a marked improvement on the sliding windows, which UK Minis retained until the release of the Mk III Mini, ADO 20, in late 1969.

The Local Content rules were based on value, and the greater the percentage of local content in the finished vehicle, the less duty was levied by the government.

By 1967, the main components still not being manufactured in Australia were the engine/transmission units.

BMC submitted three cars to be included in the Local Content Programme – the Mini, Morris 1100 and Austin 1800 – and set a target for 85% local content by 1970. No other company matched that commitment.

Secondly, cost. Due to the costs involved in re-tooling, and the relatively low volume of production – compared to the UK – the decision was made not to re-tool the Mini body shell for the changes included in the UK Mk II Mini.

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Mk II was little changed at the back.



Mk II air filter box squared-off.