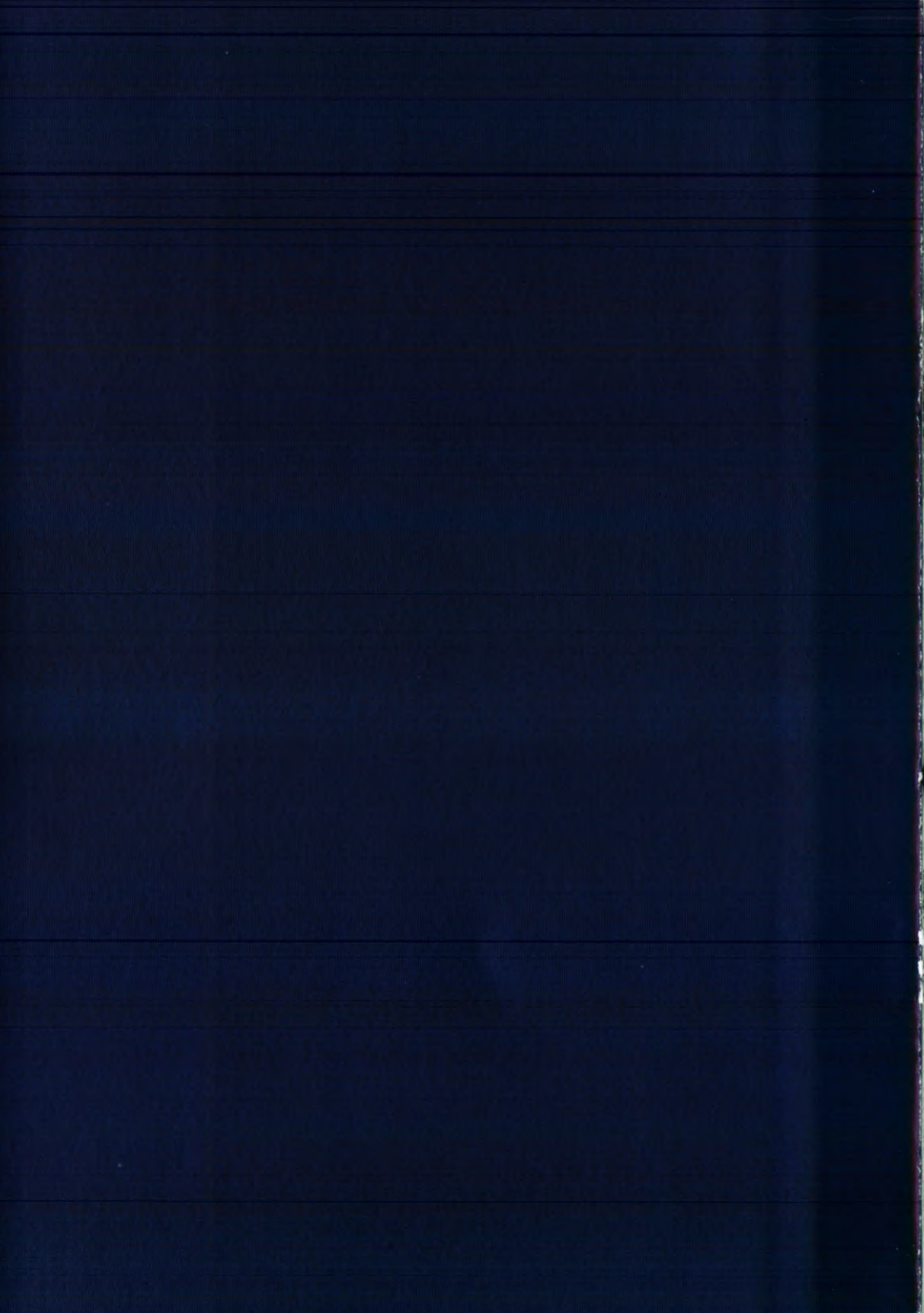




# *A Brief History*





The Mini is as youthful as the day that Sir Alec Issigonis first sketched its simple lines on a restaurant table cloth. In four decades it has become an icon and is destined to live on as one of the great legends of the world motor industry.





**1906**

The Austin Company was founded at Longbridge by Herbert Austin

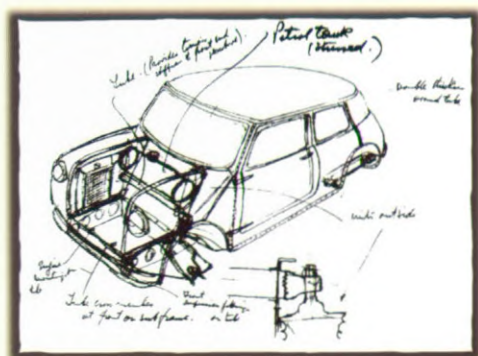
**1922**

The original Austin Seven went into production

## 1906

The modern motor car was born on 26 August 1959. On that day, BMC (British Motor Corporation) launched the Mini. BMC had been formed in 1952 by the merger of the Austin and Morris companies, so the Mini was originally launched in two versions - the Austin Seven (some times written "Se7en") and the Morris Mini-Minor. According to the original publicity, the Austin was "The Incredible Austin Seven" while the Morris was "Wizardry on Wheels".

Both of the makes involved had a long history of making successful light cars. The Austin company had been founded at Longbridge near Birmingham in 1906 by Herbert (later Lord) Austin (1866 -1941). His masterpiece was the original Austin Seven of 1922, the first small car in Britain with a four-cylinder engine (of 747cc) and room for two adults and two children. This car went on the market for £165 and remained in production for 17 years, with almost 300,000 cars being made. The Austin Seven was also successful abroad, it was built under licence in the USA, France and Germany, and



1928

The first Morris Minor was launched

1947

inspired the first Japanese Datsun car. The German version became the first car made by the BMW company in 1928.

The founder of Morris was the erstwhile cycle mechanic William Morris, later Lord Nuffield (1877 - 1963). He built his first car at Cowley near Oxford in 1913. In the 1920s, the Bullnose Morris cars, named after their distinctive radiator shape, became Britain's best-selling models. A small car, the first Morris Minor, was launched in 1928. One of the most successful Morris models pre-war was the Morris Eight of 1934 which in little more than four years reached a production well over 200,000.

By 1939 Austin and Morris were the predominant British car manufacturers, with annual outputs nudging 100,000. In the immediate post-war period, Morris was the first to bring out a new small car, the famous Morris Minor of 1948. Like the later Mini, this was designed by Alec Issigonis, and the Minor became the first British car of which one million were made. The production total for the model reached more than 1.6 million by the time

*An early Austin Seven, to become Austin Mini in 1962*



**1948**

The famous Morris Minor was launched, designed by Issigonis

**1951**

The new A-series engine was used in the A30

# 1948

it was discontinued in 1971. Austin introduced the competing A30 model in 1951, also at first known as the Austin Seven. Never as successful as the Minor, production of the A30 and later A35 derivative reached 578,000 until 1968. The importance of the A30 was however that this was the first car in which the new A-series engine was used.

At the time of the merger, both companies therefore has a long tradition of leading Britain in the matter of small car manufacture. Both the Austin and Morris brands had, especially since the Second World War, become increasingly known internationally. The Morris Minor in particular set new standards in small car design. With the A-series engine, BMC had one of the world's best small car engines. Yet there was little in the corporate history which would prepare for the impact of the Mini.

Alec Issigonis (1906 - 1988; knighted in 1969) had been born in Smyrna in present day Turkey, the son of a Bavarian mother and a Greek father who became a nationalised Briton. After the war between Greece and Turkey



*Sir Alec Issigonis at his retirement party in 1971 with his first Mini*



**1952**

Issigonis left Morris and worked on a new car for Alvis

**1956**

where Greece lost her possessions in Asia Minor, young Alec and his by then widowed mother arrived in London in 1922. Here he pursued studies of engineering and eventually began his career in the motor industry. In 1936, he joined Morris Motors at Cowley.

During the war, Issigonis began to design the small car that eventually became the Morris Minor. It was his conviction that a front-heavy car with relatively soft independent front suspension and a rigid unitary bodyshell would offer a great advantage on road holding and handling - something which was amply proved by the Minor. However, in 1952, Issigonis for a time left Morris, and for the next four years worked on a car design for the Alvis company in Coventry.

When Alvis decided they could not afford to put this car into production, Issigonis accepted an invitation from BMC's chairman Leonard Lord (1896-1967, later Lord Lambury) to re-join the company at Longbridge, initially with a brief to look at future models in general. Under the impact of the



## 1957

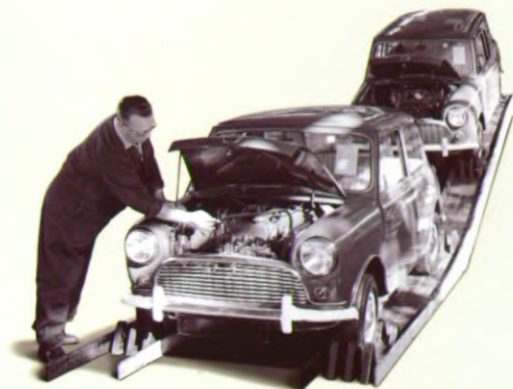
Issigonis back at Longbridge is given a free hand to design a small car

## 1957

Suez crisis in 1959 which for a brief period brought petrol rationing back to Britain, Lord decided that BMC really needed a new small car. He asked Issigonis to design this and gave him largely a free hand only stipulating that it must use the existing A-series engine.

And so Issigonis, with a small team of assistants, began the design of the Mini. His vision was of the smallest possible car that would accommodate four adults and some luggage. Having established the basic dimensions for this package, he then looked at how the engine could be fitted into the car which he saw as a box, little more than 10 feet by 4 feet by 4 feet. Before leaving Morris in 1952, he had already built a special Morris Minor with front-wheel drive and a transverse engine, and this idea was now applied to the new car. The masterstroke which made this engine installation possible was the idea of putting the gearbox in the sump of the engine. Other important space saving measures were the tiny 10 inch wheels, and the compact all independent suspension with rubber elements.





**1958**

Early prototype ready

**1959**

Production lines at Cowley and Longbridge roll simultaneously

**1959**

In the summer of 1958, Issigonis took Lord for a quick drive round the factory in one of the early prototypes. Lord was quickly convinced and told Issigonis to have the car in production within a year. And so it happened - the production lines at both Longbridge and Cowley, for Austin and Morris respectively, began to roll in the spring of 1959, in readiness for the August launch date.

Although the new car was offered for just under £500 (including Purchase Tax) in its cheapest standard form in the home market, it was not Britain's cheapest car, although it undoubtedly offered more for the money than any competitor. It took a while for the Mini to find its place in the market, and production in 1959 was only around 20,000 cars, although by 1962 BMC turned out over 200,000 cars per year and went on doing so for the next 15 years. Originally seen just as another small family car, the versatility and charm of the Mini made it a favourite with the jet setters of the swinging



**1961**

Launch of the first Mini Cooper

**1963**

Mini Cooper S was launched with the 1071cc engine

## 1960

sixties. The car quickly became something else altogether - a fashion or lifestyle statement, an icon.

Many different variations were to follow the original saloon. The period 1960 to 1964 was especially fruitful, first with estate car and van versions, then a pick-up, and in 1961 the badge engineered luxury versions of the Mini under the Wolseley Hornet and Riley Elf badges, featuring miniature versions of the classic radiator grilles of these brands, and also built-out boots with increased luggage space. More importantly, 1961 saw the launch of the first Mini Cooper, a high-performance version developed jointly with the racing car constructor John Cooper. The standard Mini's 848cc engine with 34bhp was replaced by a 997cc engine developing 55bhp, and the Cooper for the first time had front disc brakes.

In 1963 the Cooper was followed by the even more potent Mini Cooper S with a 1071cc engine and a top speed of close to 100mph. While the standard Mini and the Mini Cooper had already been used in rallying by BMC's



**1964**

Minis fitted with Hydrolastic gas/fluid suspension system

**1965**

Millionth Mini produced

1965

competitions department, the Mini Cooper S became an outstanding rally car, winning the prestigious Monte Carlo Rally three times for BMC, in 1964, 1965 and 1967, apart from many other important victories, in the hands of famous drivers such as Paddy Hopkirk, Rauno Aaltonen, and Timo Makinen. From 1964, the Mini Cooper S was fitted mostly with a new 1275cc version of the A-series engine while there was also a short lived 970cc version.

The non S Mini Cooper received a 998cc engine which already been introduced in the Wolseley and Riley models. At the other end of the Mini range, the utilitarian Mini Moke was introduced, a simple lightweight vehicle originally intended for military applications. Also in 1964, many Minis received the interconnected Hydrolastic gas/fluid suspension system.

The first millionth Mini was produced in 1965. By now the model was well established and apart from Britain, was manufactured in several overseas locations, including notably Australia and by the Innocenti company in Italy.





**1967**

Mark II Minis were introduced at the Motor Show

# 1966

Later Minis would also be built in South Africa, Belgium and Spain, as well as in other countries where BMC importers set up local assembly operations. The Mini had become a world car. In 1965, the option of an automatic gearbox was offered for the first time.

By 1967, a small face lift was deemed to be in order, and the Mark II Mini range, introduced at the Motor Show, had new radiator grilles, bigger rear windows, and other cosmetic changes. The standard models now became available with the 998cc engine as an alternative to the 848cc size. In the following year, the BMC company merged with Leyland (also by this time owner of the Rover and Triumph brands). Under the new management of the British Leyland company, a thoroughly overhauled Mini range was launched at the end of 1969.

The new range for the first time abandoned the traditional Austin and Morris names - Mini now became established as a brand in its own right. Compared to the original models, improvements across the board included



**1969**

Complete overhaul of the Mini range was launched

**1976**

Four-millionth Mini produced

**1976**

wind down windows in place of the original sliding door windows, and new concealed door hinges. In fact the entire bodyshell was an additional model range featuring an alternative front end design, the Clubman saloon and estate car models, as well as a new 1275 GT model. Riley and Wolseley versions were however discontinued, and of the Mini Cooper models only the 1275cc S lived on briefly in a Mark III version before being discontinued in 1971. Van and pick-up models were continued, but the Mini Moke had been dropped from the UK line-up in 1968, although production continued in Australia, and later in Portugal.

The second millionth Mini was made in 1969. The highest annual production figure of more than 318,000 Minis made worldwide was reached in 1971 and in 1972, the third millionth car was made, followed in 1976 by number four million. After several abortive attempts at replacing the Mini, the BL company now had a new small car under development, to be launched as the Austin MiniMetro in 1980. To make way for this new model,

*TV personality Noel Edmonds drives number 5,000,000 off the line*



**1979**

The 20th Anniversary of the Mini

**1980**

Austin MiniMetro was launched

# 1977

the Mini range in the early 1980s was pruned back. The Clubman models, including the estate car and the 1275 GT, all disappeared, and a little later so did the van and pick-up versions. Most overseas production had already been stopped. The 850 saloon also disappeared, leaving only the 1000 saloon to carry on.

Nevertheless, the Mini still enjoyed considerable popularity, and the 20th anniversary of the model in 1979 had been marked by the first of several large birthday parties. A special anniversary model was also produced, becoming the first of many Mini-based limited editions. However, with the new Metro taking over most of BL's small car sales, Mini production figures quickly dropped to much lower levels than in its heyday. Nevertheless, in 1986 the five millionth Mini came off the Longbridge production line. There were also steady improvements to the Mini, with 1984 seeing the introduction of 12 inch wheels and front disc brakes for the first time in the standard model.





**1986**

New campaign to revitalise the Mini

*1990*

In 1986, the BL company became the Rover Group, under Graham Day's management, and Day personally authorised a new campaign to revitalise the Mini, with famous slogans such as "You never forget your first Mini", and "Minis have feelings too". These efforts bore fruit particularly in export markets, notably in Japan where Mini sales rose from 1000 cars in 1985 to a remarkable 12,000 in 1990, helping the Mini to achieve its best recent production figure of 46,000 cars in that year.

By now the Mini had celebrated its 30th anniversary. A remarkable high performance derivative, the ERA-Mini with a turbocharged engine from the MG Metro, saw limited production. In 1990 Rover, again with the enthusiastic help of John Cooper, brought back the Mini Cooper, first as a limited edition, soon after as a standard production model. The new Mini Cooper quickly became the best-selling Mini version, and featured many 1960s design cues, such as two-tone colour schemes and Minilite-style cast alloy wheels.



**1991**

Mini fitted with catalytic converter

**1994**

BMW's chairman Bernd Pischetsrieder was a relative of Sir Alec Issigonis

## 1991

The original carburettor engined model was replaced in 1991 by a fuel injection version which was also the first Mini to be fitted with a catalytic converter.

The 1275cc engine from the new Mini Cooper was eventually also fitted, in a less powerful form, to the standard Mini saloon, while in 1992 the first Rover produced Mini convertible appeared - after numerous aftermarket conversions over a period of 30 years. At £12,000 this was the most expensive Mini ever but still found a niche in the market.

In 1994, Rover Group after a period of six years in the ownership of British Aerospace, was sold to the German car maker BMW. When it was discovered that BMW's chairman Bernd Pischetsrieder was a relative of the Mini's creator Alec Issigonis (Pischetsrieder's grandmother was a sister of Issigonis's mother), this was only one factor which prompted increased speculation as to the possibility of seeing an all new Mini. The company's



**1996**

A new Mini to be made for the new millennium

1996

other small car, the erstwhile Mini replacement born as the Metro in 1980, now in a much-modified and improved form known as the Rover 100 Series, was eventually expected to go out of production before the Mini.

Rover Group observers were not disappointed. In 1996, the company confirmed that there would be an all-new Mini for the new millennium, to be built in the UK in higher numbers than the current model, and fitted with a new engine developed jointly between Rover/BMW and Chrysler, to be made in a new factory in Brazil and also to be fitted to future Chrysler products. There was also a new much-modified 1997 Mini range of two models, Mini and Mini Cooper, both sharing the same engine, a 1275cc A series with multi-point fuel injection and 63bhp. Both models cost £8995 on the road in the UK, but potential customers could easily spend a lot more on a Mini, choosing special equipment, accessories and paint and trim schemes from a wider than ever options list.





**1997**

The concept cars would not resemble the new production models yet to come

Project R50 - the new Mini revealed at Frankfurt

**1997**

With these new models, Rover gave a clear signal that the Mini now and for the future would be positioned as a specialised more up-market type of small car, not as a mass produced entry level model. The image of the Mini brand was reinforced and sharpened with a new badge, and a special set of brand values defined as "energy, escapism, excitement, individuality and innovation". And while Rover in early 1997 showed several concept vehicles such as the MGF based ACV 30 and the radical Spiritual models, the company was at pains to point out that none of these would resemble the actual new production model yet to come. This car, codename Project R50, was revealed at Frankfurt in September 1997. The legend that is Mini lives on.



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