

# The Mini: Less Is More [B2]

Nata in un periodo di crisi, l'auto più amata dagli inglesi del XX secolo, ha rivoluzionato per sempre il panorama dell'industria automobilistica.

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Sometimes, less really is more. Which is how the Mini became Britain's favourite car, with 5.5 million sold. Manufactured from August 1959 to October 2000, it revolutionised the motor industry with its combination of style, innovation, economy and sense of fun.

## SUEZ CRISIS

Necessity, it is said, is the mother of invention. In 1956, the Suez Crisis limited British access to fuel and oil. Petrol rationing, which had ended after World War Two, was briefly reintroduced. With the increased demand for small, cheaper cars, the British Motor Corporation (BMC) set up a new project called ADO15. Greek-British motor engineer Alexander (Alec) Issigonis was asked to lead the design team.

## DREAMS COME TRUE

Issigonis was born in the Ottoman port city of Smyrna (now in Turkey) in 1906. His father was of Greek origin and worked in shipbuilding engineering. His mother's German family had ties to manufacturers BMW and Volkswagen. No surprise then that young Alec aspired to be a renowned motor engineer.

## SMALL BUT SPACIOUS

Issigonis' two-door, four-seater Mini was launched by manufacturer British Leyland in August 1959. Initially there were two models — the Austin Seven and the Morris Mini-Minor — that later became one. The car was just 3.054 metres in length and 1.422 metres in width, but Issigonis had used every inch of space available, allocating 80 per cent for passengers and their

luggage. It had an 848cc transverse engine and ten-inch tyres. The boot was bottom hinged so that it could be left open while the car was being driven, making it possible to carry large items.

## POP CULTURE

Although the launch of the Mini caused a sensation in the motor industry, initial sales were slow. In the 1960s, however, the car became an icon of pop culture. All four members of the Beatles owned Minis, while the Mini featured in many TV shows and films, most famously in the 1969 crime caper The Italian Job, starring Michael Caine.

## RACE TRACK

When the new Mini Cooper, with its larger engine, hit the race track, its success turned a cute family car into a sexy speedster. It won the Monte Carlo rally from 1964 to 1967 and helped launch the careers of racing drivers Niki Lauda and James Hunt.

## TIMELESS CLASSIC

BMW acquired British Leyland in 1996 and the last original Mini rolled off the production line in 2000. In 2001, a modern version was launched and was an instant (if rather less economical) hit. It built on the quirky aesthetics, reliable performance and phenomenal feelgood factor of Issigonis' original Mini — one of the biggest success stories in British motor engineering history.

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# Glossary

- **race track** = pista, circuito
- **cute** = carino
- **speedster** = auto sportiva
- **hit** = successo
- **inch** = pollice (25,4 mm)
- **tyres** = pneumatici
- **boot** = bagagliaio
- **crime caper** = film d'azione
- **quirky** = strano
- **four-seater** = a quattro posti
- **bottom hinged** = con cerniera inferiore
- **rolled off** = cadere da, rotolare giù
- **built on** = basarsi su