

INTERIOR

WHAT IS IT LIKE ON THE INSIDE?

Somewhere in Mini, there's a very satisfied historian who's always wanted the brand to return to its 1959 roots and make a car with only a handful of physical controls and one display. Mission accomplished: the Mini Cooper is extremely minimalist inside, with all functionality and info coming at you via a 24cm circular OLED display.

Yes, that includes the speedo: you can have this ahead of the driver via a head-up display, but stupidly Mini has made this an optional extra, which we despise. It ought to be standard. Having to glance into the centre of the dashboard and to a very busy screen to see how fast you're travelling is an extremely dumb piece of design. Just like in a [Tesla](#), which Mini should have more common sense than to copy.

Otherwise, the screen is largely a triumph, with swift reactions, a cheery interface and easy-enough shortcuts for temperature controls. Finding the sub-menu for a heated seat is a pain, but you can set those to come on automatically when the temperature gets chilly. Or you could ask the built-in voice assistance, which takes the form of [a cartoon dog called Spike](#). Cute, but the bank manager voice doesn't match the face and he meets far too many requests with "sorry, I don't know how to do that yet." It's like having a chat with Siri in a countryside signal blackspot.

The biggest negative is probably when using Apple CarPlay or Android Auto, as just about everyone does. That's because pairing your phone brings up an awkward small square in the middle of the circular screen, and while it works well enough it's a real downside to an otherwise aesthetically smart looking system. Square peg in a round hole springs to mind.

DOES IT FEEL LIKE A HIGH-QUALITY PRODUCT?

It's less kitsch and more grown-up in look, and perhaps a little more austere as a result. There's a lot of hard plastic on the doors, the central 'clutch bag' cubby has a cheap-feeling lid mechanism, and the 'netting' surface to the dash top looks novel but is neither soft-touch nor especially practical, as it's a dust-trap for any detritus in the car. Overall the car feels solidly built, which is just as well with that ride shaking its mountings.

STILL ESSENTIALLY A TWO-SEATER?

Someone wise once noted that the Mini was a two-door, two-seater sports car pretending to be a hatchback. And that largely rings true today: the rear seat space is pathetic, access is cramped and despite the adjustable boot floor it'll only take a family pet to the vet if your chosen companion is a stick insect or a hamster that's been off its food.

Indeed, most of the time you may well be tempted to leave the 50/50 folding rear bench lying flat and treat the Cooper like a hard-top pick-up truck. You're looking at 210 litres of space with the seats up, or 725 litres with them folded flat. Yeah, not big, but you knew that already.

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