

DRIVING

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO DRIVE?

Twist the retro keylike fob to start. While the Cooper C is rather subdued, in the Cooper S you're met with a thrummy little burble which sounds like it's being augmented through the speakers – it's not the most authentic sounding hot hatch, in other words, but few cars in this class actually make an interesting noise. The [Fiesta ST](#) was a rare exception, now sadly consigned to history too soon.

You select Drive or Reverse via a stubby toggle switch on the centre console; a neat space-saving solution that pays homage to the original 1959 Mini toggle switches. We doubt many owners will bemoan the fact this means the ability to manually override gearshifts using the gearstick has disappeared.

IS IT FAST?

The Cooper C develops 156bhp and gets from 0-62mph in 7.7 seconds, the S develops 201bhp and manages the same sprint in 6.6s. Respectable for a small hot hatch but easily at the mercy of most EV crossovers, such is the weird world we live in.

You might feel affronted that you need Sport trim and its bolshy body kit to get paddles used to interact with the gearbox, but the fact is the manual override is pretty slurred at best, and the gearbox's coding makes good use of the 170/221lb ft of torque, resisting the urge to bung in an ill-advised lunge for second gear when joining a motorway.

And in fact, we preferred the lesser powered Cooper C, which you're forced to work that bit harder. It's by no means underpowered, it just feels that bit more engaging. Leans into the traditional Mini vibe, that.

DON'T TELL ME... IT'S GOT GO-KART HANDLING?

Ugh, no. We'd never stoop to that level: this is a 1,300kg front-wheel drive hot hatch, not a lawnmower engine in a tubular frame with no suspension. But we digress. Mini's 'go kart' marketing bent does get a tad tiring at times, and selecting 'go kart' mode on the 'Experiences' toggle and getting a "whoo-hoo!" from the speakers does nothing to change that impression.

Nevertheless, this is a fun car to drive; almost artificially agile in its responses to the steering just off centre and pleasingly happy to rotate on the brakes. It doesn't have the 'authentic'

performance car feel of a Fiesta ST or [Hyundai i20N](#) – it’s more caricatured than that, more exaggerated and cartoonish in its behaviour.

But it does a good job of making mundane journeys a tad friskier, and this latest car is better resolved at being a grown up premium pod when you just want to go from A to B without pretending you’re on a stag do grand prix.

COMFY? REFINED?

Not a Cooper strong suit, traditionally, and the same rings true here, whether you go for the C or the S. In compressions and over crests the car’s taut, controlled damping are key to its agile, impish appeal, but if you’re spending the lion’s share of your driving in an urban commute then either Cooper will become wearisome.

The car’s nemesis is speed bumps, which it shudders over as if ice cubes have been tipped down its seat backs. It’s also un-fond of expansion joints on motorway bridges. See also, jarring, crashing protestations on level crossings.

A quick word on running costs: we averaged 40.5mpg in the C, compared to Mini’s official claims of 47.9mpg. That plays 44.8mpg in the S, so real world there’ll likely be minimal difference between the two.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE RANGE

THE FASTEST

2.0 S Sport [Level 3] 3dr Auto

0-62	6.6s
CO2	
BHP	201.2
MPG	
Price	£35,225

View all specs

THE CHEAPEST

1.5 C Classic 3dr Auto

0-62	7.7s
------	------