

**2009 Mini Clubman
Cooper Works Edition
Fun Ride with an Eye on “Youification”
By: David Ray, www.hookedondriving.com
For: The Wheel**



If you speak with Mini owners, both of the classic British era, and of the modern-day BMW design, you will find them with nothing but pride, praise and enthusiasm for their cars. Let's face it, on the cute/cool car scale, the Mini has always been a 10 out of 10. As the newer BMW version has matured in the market, it became obvious that to grow their indigenous franchises, they would need to branch out. Build specialty versions, expand the brand, and move into new markets to stretch their sales potential. So, early on the standard version was sellable as a practical economy car for the green and cost-conscious buyer. Then came the Cooper S with the supercharger (in the earlier version), wheels, suspension and performance tweaks, then top of the line Cooper Works edition. This sample of Mini-ness was to take the car upscale in the market, probably shooting for RX-8, 350Z, and even Mustang buyers. And it was a success. And, while we quietly preferred the supercharged engine of the initial reincarnation of the Mini, we wrote a positive article on the new version carrying the BMW built turbo four (see Reviews section of our website). For 2007, with a number of tweaks and a facelift, the Mini was successfully moved into Version 2.0 without the loss of momentum in sales, or loss of energy from the enthusiasts.

In 2008, Mini attacked a significant issue of interior space by releasing the very sexy and fun Clubman version. The Clubman has 3" more wheelbase at 100.3" and is 9" longer overall than the standard Mini body at 155.8". This added substantial legroom and/or rear storage to move the car into competition with more practical four seaters in the market. The Clubman is just cool

– looks like a stock Mini that spent the afternoon on the frame rack – same classic Mini shape only with just a bit of a limo stretch effect. And the cars have sold well. So what would be the next natural thing to do for BMW, an aggressive company with regard to new products (note: BMW X6)?

Voila, the hot rod version of the Clubman was the next natural progression in the lineage.

I was excited to get a chance to spend a week with the Cooper Works Clubman. The car has such a rich heritage in combining the Mini concept and mystique with that of BMW's engineering and build quality, it was going to be a fun time for sure. Let's give some basic specs on the car first:

4 cylinder, turbocharged engine with 208 HP and 192 lb ft of torque w/overboost up to 207 lb ft
17" alloy wheels
12.4" vented front rotors, 11.0 rear rotors
6 speed transmission
McPherson strut front suspension, Multi-link rear
Weight 2888 lbs
Weight distribution front/rear 58/42

Being the third time we've driven a current Mini product, including the older supercharged version, a newer turbo sedan and this new Cooper Works Clubman, we had a bit more time to get comfy with the car, and this had good and bad implications. Initially, some of the quirks of the Mini was just cool – sometimes different can be good. But this time, we must admit that the coolness of the quirks started to wear off, and some of them became a bit of a pain. Note the center-dash mounted speedometer. Visually striking, many Mini buyers just see this as a cute character statement. Clearly it's a feature to save production costs while building both right and left-hand drive versions. But when you would like to know what your speed is, this speedo is just not there for you. With markings limited to 20/40/60mph and so on – and having to take your eyes WAY off of the road to see it, this feature became annoying. Especially when I spied a radar trap on a local street and needed to know NOW whether I was jail bait or not. The entire Mini product line has stellar quality of materials and build, which is true of the seats as well. But frankly, they do not have much support for the sporting that the Works edition can do. Clearly, Mini has solved the problem of NO legroom in the back of the regular body – with reasonable useable space for four with the Clubman, so this effort was well worth it. But here we go again – two bugaboos appeared with daily use of the car – the clamshell door to access the rear seat is only on the passenger side. The clamshell, ala RX-8, is quite useful, but is just inconvenient to require the passenger riding behind the driver to virtually crawl into and out of place. And here's one that the designers need a spanking for – the rear seatbacks that drop to offer a handy box-shaped storage area have their releases in the middle of the back of the seat. In other words, the only time its convenient to access this release is from the back hatch and only when there's nothing being stored – if there are groceries or a bag of soccer balls already aboard, one has to finagle to find the seatback release. And they're simply not accessible from the front. Please fix this BMW, ok?



I know, we're sounding negative and I can't stay that way with a car as fun and cool as the Works Clubman. To drive this car is to enjoy it – and yes – you'll smile. With 208 horsepower up front, you'd better hold on when you hit the boost of the twin-scroll turbos. While I know they've come a long way from the old days of terminal torque steer in torquey front drivers, I've got to admit that the driver of the Works Clubman had better be on station when the power comes on. Otherwise an un-called-for lane change is imminent. While I got used to this personality "quirk" and smoothed things out with a few days driving, I'm just not a fan of turbo power in a front drive car. (See Mazdaspeed 3 review on website)

In normal sporting driving though, you'll get a kick out of this Works edition. Firm but manageable ride quality, nicely quiet for the family of cars it's in, and it simply runs and reacts like a Swiss watch. The gearshift is a sweetheart with quick, smooth, short throws, and the steering is very interactive. Pushing the car in a controlled driving situation, I must admit to a bit of a disappointment with ample understeer and body roll effecting my fun and making a bit harder to toss into drift than the previous supercharged model I remember.

But the Works Clubman, in the end, is a success. The strikingly unique styling of the Mini is only enhanced by its stretched and less boxy look, the additional room is worth a minimal increase in weight and overall size, and driving this version is good clean fun. With a 6.5 second 0-60mph time, you will also surprise some pretty respectable rides out there if they're caught napping. And with regard to my comments about pushing the car – this is where the MiniUSA website comes in with their term "Youification." I love this term. These guys are obviously enthusiasts and have built a car that is great to start with, but wide open to infusing it with performance and appearance upgrades to be sure that your Mini is and will remain unique. Whether it's brake kits, checkered flags on the roof, aero kits, camber plates, sport seats,

upgraded sound systems, owners of these cars LOVE enhancing them – and BMW LOVES to help as well. At our last Hooked On Minis, we had around 50 Minis on track. We studied and studied the field of cars and did not find two exactly alike. I'll add that one of the most respected sources of Mini enhancements – going WAY back to the heyday of the original Mini, is Don Racine's MiniMania just up the road in Grass Valley.

So it's a win/win proposition – drive the sporty Cooper Works Clubman au natural and have a fun and practical friend, or go crazy and use it as a platform for making something uniquely special.