

BRITISH CULTURE & SOCIETY II

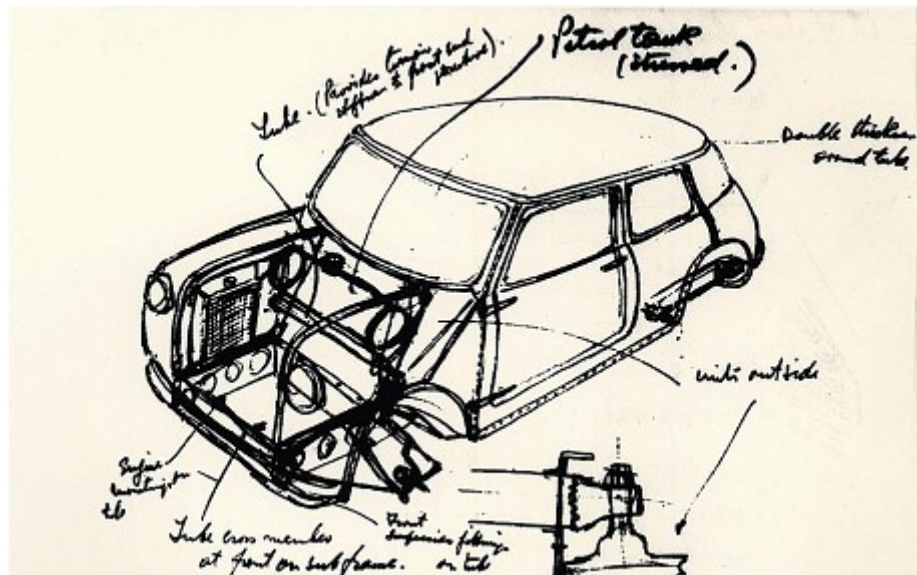
Mini: a brief history

The Mini is a small [economy car](#) made by the [British Motor Corporation](#) (BMC) and its successors from 1959 until 2000. The original is considered a British icon of the 1960s. Its space-saving front-wheel drive layout – allowing 80 percent of the area of the car's [floorpan](#) to be used for passengers and luggage – influenced a generation of car makers. The vehicle is in some ways considered the British equivalent of its German contemporary the [Volkswagen Beetle](#), which enjoyed similar popularity in North America or the Fiat 500. In 1999 the Mini was voted the second most influential [car of the 20th century](#), behind the [Ford Model T](#).



The [all-new Mini](#) was revealed on what would have been Mini creator Sir Alec Issigonis's 107th birthday. Today's [Mini](#) is, of course, very different to that first car. [Under the ownership of the BMW Group](#), the Mini – or MINI, as it's officially labelled – is bigger, and is just one of a family of related models. A family that

will expand with this latest generation to incorporate versions that Issigonis (who died in 1988) would never have dreamed of.



But what was Issigonis's vision, and why has the Mini enjoyed such an enduring appeal? Issigonis, born in 1906, was a talented engineer and designer who worked for Humber, Austin and, from 1936, Morris Motors Ltd. There he worked on a number of cars, including the Morris Minor. In 1955 he was recruited by the British Motor Corporation to design a family of new models.

The smaller of these took priority when fuel rationing was introduced to the Suez Crisis and development was accelerated. In August 1959 that small car was launched as the Morris Mini Minor and the Austin Seven. It wasn't until 1961 that it was renamed the Austin Mini, and eight years after that Mini became a marque in its own right.

Issigonis's design broke the mould. Throughout its evolution, the Mini was at the forefront of design and engineering innovation. It was the first small car to have front wheel drive and had small 10 inch wheels. It had a transverse engine, which saved space and allowed a reasonable sized engine to fit into a small engine cavity. The sump was designed so that the same engine oil also lubricated the gears system. The radiator was on the left side of the engine cavity, again saving space.

The mini had a suspension system based on rubber cones, not conventional springs. This saved further space, allowing the car to be lower down than other similar cars of its day. Sliding windows were a feature developed with this small car in mind. This innovative design meant that storage space was available in the doors. It revolutionized the small car and became the best-selling British car in history, with a production run of 5.3 million units. Production ran until 2000. During the 1960s it became popular with celebrities and was seen in films and on TV across the world, ensuring that it became design icon. One of its most famous appearances was in the film 'The Italian Job', driven by actors including Michael Cane.

In between, the Mini underwent numerous changes of name and engine, and detail upgrades were made to its exterior design. Different body styles were created too, but its fundamental character and layout were unchanged and it was the "standard" two-door model that had the most timeless appeal: the final model that rolled off the production line in 2000 didn't look that different to the original 1959 car.



During its lifespan the original Mini was produced at various factories by BMC, then British Leyland and finally the Rover Group. The Rover Group was bought by BMW in 1994 and development on an all-new Mini started. At the 1997 Geneva Motor Show Mini displayed two concept cars that suggested a possible new design direction – the Mini Spiritual and Spiritual Too were three- and five-door models respectively, which aimed to re-interpret the original Mini's brief in

for the 21st century. With a white roof and round headlights the retro-styled ACV30 concept car (based on an MGF and designed to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Mini's win at the 1967 Monte Carlo Rally) was a glimpse of things to come.

When BMW sold the Rover Group in 2000 it retained ownership of the Mini name, and in 2001 it launched its take on what a Modern Mini should be. The new car was built at its plant in Cowley, Oxford, and although many fans of the original Mini mocked the newcomer's larger dimensions and faux-historical design, it struck a chord and proved to be a huge commercial success.

Personalisation was a key part of the car's appeal and thousands of different colour and trim options were offered. Buyers lapped it up and the average price of Minis leaving the showroom far exceeded their list prices.



Mini stretched the idea of what a Mini could be when it launched the Countryman in 2010. The "crossover" model was the biggest Mini ever, and was available with four-wheel drive. Unlike the existing models, it was built not in England, but in Austria. Despite more than a few snide sneers and comments, it has become a global sales success.

Whether or not Sir Alec Issigonis would have approved of today's Mini, the fact that the new car will inevitably be compared with the one he designed more

than half a century ago is testament to just how much that original car is loved and revered.

Vocabulary Check

Write the English meaning for the following words taken from the text:

- a) revealed _____
- b) enduring _____
- c) priority _____
- d) accelerated _____
- e) revolutionized _____
- f) fundamental _____
- g) glimpse _____
- h) mocked _____
- i) appeal _____
- j) revered _____
- k) newcomer _____
- l) lifespan _____
- m) underwent _____

Comprehension Questions

Write the answer to the following questions in your own words with a sentence:

- 1) How was the Mini more comfortable for passengers?

- 2) What effect did this have on future car design?

- 3) Who was Alec Issigonis? Why was he recruited?

4) Why was development of the smaller new model accelerated?

5) What was different about the Mini's wheels?

6) What 4 design details saved space?

7) What happened to the Mini during the 1960s?

8) What was the main attraction of the new BMW Mini?

9) How was the 2010 Countryman model different to existing models?
