



Media Information
30 September

Historic victories: MINI in international motorsport.

Paris. The MINI carries motorsport in its genes. While Alec Issigonis, credited with creating the classic MINI, concentrated primarily on the every-day suitability of the car, his friend and business partner John Cooper immediately sensed potential of a different kind when he first saw the sketches: In this novel small production car the successful racing car constructor recognised the basis for a promising sporty vehicle, and zealously set about converting the MINI.

Thus the foundation for an unequalled motorsport success story was laid, with the name John Cooper still being inextricably entwined with the sporting legend that is MINI. Victories in the Rally Monte Carlo are as much part of its history as are the successful production cars which bear the Cooper badge.

MINI scored its first success in the year of its birth: In 1959 Pat Moss (GB) won the Mini Miglia National Rally with a MINI 850. Spurred on by early successes in the Rally Monte Carlo in 1960, Cooper proposed a GT model based on the MINI. Despite initial scepticism from Issigonis, but with the blessing of BMC chairman George Harriman, the 1,000 cc MINI Cooper, which benefitted from comprehensive modifications to the engine to raise power from 21 to 55 bhp, went into limited production. The MINI Cooper was capable of approximately 130 km/h after suitable transmission ratios were specified to match its sporty potential, while front wheel disc brakes ensured adequate retardation.

The result of these endeavours inspired Issigonis, who, together with John Cooper, immediately set about the next stage of performance enhancement. For the MINI Cooper S, the engine was bored to the maximum possible, with the ensuing capacity of 1071 cc enabling the car to contest motorsport's 1100 cc class. The result was impressive: The engine delivered 70 bhp at 6,200 rpm, revving to a maximum of 7,200 rpm. This version, too, received upgraded brakes – servo assistance further improving braking power.

In 1962 the MINI Cooper S first caused a stir in Monte Carlo. With Rauno Aaltonen at the wheel, the small car embarked on a David versus Goliath crusade against obviously more powerful opponents. However, just three kilometres from the end, Aaltonen, leading at the time, misjudged a corner and rolled out of the event. The following year, though, the Finn made up for this disappointment: Driving a MINI Cooper S he was placed third overall and won his class.

It would get better: During the 1963/1964 winter rally season power was increased even further. Driving spectacularly, Paddy Hopkirk (IR) was placed first overall in the Rally Monte Carlo in the tiny sprinter. Thus the MINI acquired legendary status. In 1965 Finland's Timo Mäkinen and co-driver Paul Easter (GB) repeated the Monte triumph. They were the only crew to complete thousands of kilometres without penalty – despite gruelling winter conditions. Only 35 cars – including three MINI Cooper S – made it to the finish out of a total field of 237 entries.

Company
Bayerische
Motoren Werke
Aktiengesellschaft

Postal Address
BMW AG
80788 München

Telephone
+49 (0)89 382 30641

Internet
www.bmwgroup.com



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A hat trick was targeted for the following year. Drivers Timo Mäkinen, Rauno Aaltonen and Paddy Hopkirk sensationally achieved the feat by mounting the finish ramp in first, second and third respectively. However, bitter disappointment was to follow: The trio was disqualified after the rally's stewards decreed the MINI's headlight dipping mechanism did not conform to homologation requirements. For the general public this technicality, though, mattered little, with their enthusiasm for the three MINI drivers remaining undiminished.

Hopkirk, Aaltonen and Mäkinen entered the annals of the Rally Monte Carlo as the "Three Musketeers". The MINI's third Monte Carlo victory, achieved in 1967 by Aaltonen, was celebrated all the more enthusiastically after the events of the previous year. This time there were absolutely no doubts about the car's eligibility. In 1965 the "Rally Professor" Aaltonen had triumphed in the European Rally Championship, with Tony Ambrose (GB) and Mäkinen completing an excellent result for the MINI Cooper S by finishing second and third respectively. In addition, various MINI drivers celebrated numerous individual victories across Europe.

However, the MINI did not shine only in rallying. In the 1960s the car achieved equal success on motor racing circuits. With its sporting qualities, it became one of the definitive racing cars of the decade, with many legendary drivers starting their careers with MINI. In April 1968 Niki Lauda (AT) contested his first hill climb near Linz (AT) in a classic MINI, finishing second. Just two weeks later he scored his first victory, displaying the sort of talent which would ultimately net him three Formula One titles. Like Lauda, other Formula One world champions such as Graham Hill, Jackie Stewart, John Surtees, Jochen Rindt and James Hunt all collected their first competition experiences in a classic MINI.

The MINI is also present on the contemporary motor racing scene. The MINI CHALLENGE, introduced in 2004, has established itself as one of the world's most popular club racing series, with the category currently being hotly contested in six countries – Germany, Spain, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina and Brazil. The series will continue in parallel with the World Rally Championship programme.

For questions please contact:

Jörg Kottmeier, BMW Corporate Affairs, Head of Sports Communications, Office: +49 (0) 89 382 23401, Mobile: +49 (0) 170 5666 112, joerg.kottmeier@bmw.de

Ingo Lehbrink, BMW Corporate Affairs, Sports Communications, Office: +49 (0)89 382 76003, Mobile: +49 (0) 176 20340224, ingo.lehbrink@bmw.de

Cypselus von Frankenberg, Head of MINI Product Communications;
Office: +49 (0)89 382 30641, Mobile: +49 (0)170 7965284, Cypselus.von-Frankenberg@mini.com

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Media Website: www.press.bmwgroup.com
E-mail: presse@bmw.de