

**MOTORING**



**DIFFERENT WAYS OF BEING MINI**

**Guilherme Marques**

**TEST DRIVE** || I drove a Mini this month. Not the one I most wanted though. Life can be cruel for a motoring writer.

I was already going to write about the last Mini I drove when a new email arrives in my inbox with two super funky new concepts from the BMW-owned constructor. Perfect timing.

We will get here. First things first. The Mini Cooper 5 Door is the practical Mini for those who still want a relatively small city car, a model which can still trace its aesthetic roots to the original Issigonis design of 1959.

It's not hard to understand a Mini customer is someone who buys his car because he feels a certain connection to the brand. A Mini customer always looks at a Mini first. That is not something many brands can say.

With all cars looking pretty much like the next one these days, including their respective electric powertrains, being different is becoming an increasingly powerful asset.

The Cooper is now the entry model to the petrol-powered Mini catalogue, packing a three-cylinder turbo 1.5 litre engine, making 156 horse power. The transmission is an eight-speed double-clutch Steptronic.

I am not going to skirt around the issue though:

this is the least exciting Mini I have ever driven with an internal combustion engine up front. For someone who drove around for many, many kilometres in the family's Cooper S from 2008, that is kind of a sad realisation.

However, I am absolutely sure this is how the engineers intended this car to be like. Mini as a brand has had to adapt to a market that is not the same as it was when BMW launched the new Mini in 2000. That was an easy market to read. This one is not.

You simply have to cover as many bases as possible

*The Cooper 5 Door is a nice everyday car. 'The Skeg' and 'The Machina' are two outrageous concepts. Being a Mini can be a comprehensive idea.*

and have a car for every customer. That car cannot be a one-trick-pony anymore either: it has to be as versatile as it possibly can. The new Mini from the year 2000 was a sports car disguised as a small city hatchback. It focused on the task of making the driver having a blast at the wheel. This one I drove is not that.

What it is, though, is a very good normal car. A car to do everything in. The school run, the weekend trip, the daily chores. All of it. And because it's a Mini, it will do it with a bit more flair, of course. Hence why I said customers who buy these cars want these cars. They also tend to want more space, more comfort, more practicality, bigger screens, more connectivity. The whole nine yards. And they are willing to sacrifice a bit of the fun part for that rational approach.

Truth be told, the Mini delivers. It's a cool car. And it gets cooler the more optional extras you throw at it, which customers usually do. Base price is €32,000.

It isn't, however, as cool as the two concepts you see in these pages. Born from a collaboration with the Deus Ex Machina clothing brand, they are being shown at the Munich Auto Show since Monday.

The first one is a Mini John Cooper Works Electric called 'The Skeg' - that's the yellow and silver car. Mini says it's inspired by the surfing world, and they have



against much more powerful machinery.

The diffuser is closely inspired by the JCW Nürburgring racecar. And just look at those magnificent spotlights, the wheelarches, the bespoke grille, the perforated headlights, the enormous rear spoiler. It's too much! Mini shouldn't do this to us, people who love these things.

Inside, we have five-point harnesses, aluminium floor plates, a hydraulic handbrake and a spectacularly exposed roll cage.

Both cars put the big Deus Ex Machina X on display on the roof, a kind of stamp of this partnership. Looks good too.

Unfortunately, me, or you, will most likely never get to see these two. Nor will something remotely like them will ever make it to standard production. But I sure am happy to see there is still some blood in Mini's veins. For this brand, that counts for something.

the surfboard-styled rear spoiler plus the straps for tying down extra boards on the roof to prove it.

The wide wheel arches are glorious and get this: custom fibreglass panels cut the total weight of the car by 15%. That, together with the fibreglass dashboard, the lightweight buckets and the amazing fibreglass trays for the wetsuits, tells me this car will never make production. The business plan would be a disaster. Boo!

The second concept is 'The Machina'. Painted red, white and black and inspired by the world of motorsport, it makes me a bit weak in the knees, if I'm honest. It's one of those "I want this car", "I need this car", "How much could I get for a kidney to buy one?"

All I see is a modern Mini that seems ready to tackle a rally special stage right away. A Mini in the best tradition of what Paddy Hopkirk did in 1964, winning the Rally of Monte Carlo



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