

Half time: Morris Mini from 1959 – since eight years on the quest for the original thing.

Exactly half a century has gone by since the small car was first launched; that changed the world of automobiles:

The Mini.

We met a restorer who had one objective for the past eight years: To rebuild an authentic example of a Mini of the first production year. On the right hand gutter are traces of what seems to be damages caused by rolling it over, the rotten boot floor is cut out and lies in the footwell, and so does the rear seat floor that doesn't look any better. No one knows what surprises are awaiting inside the engine and gearbox; all components of the suspension have to be refurbished or replaced. Yes it takes a lot of imagination to see the interim result of eight years restoration work when looking at the bodyshell awaiting completion in Joachim Bunkus' professional workshop. And of course the question could be asked by those who don't know any better: Why would one do this? Aren't there enough other better Minis one could restore?? "Not that many" laughs Stefan Sellin, since 2001 owner of the car. "The magic number is 1959. Just 109 Austin and Morris Mini of this first year are known to exist. When I bought this car practically without viewing it, it was claimed to be a 1961 model; and I didn't quite know what I wanted to do with it. Then I saw the early chassis number and it was at once clear what I had there. And that only a 100% authentic restoration was the right thing for this car."

In the first year of the Mini things were changed almost every week. Nowadays fans of the '59 Mini are sometimes religiously originality obsessed and Sellin almost automatically joined them. "I have completely dismantled it, did sort of an inventory and then had the shell – carefully – sandblasted. Wherever possible we retained the original parts, that was my objective. Since then I have been I have intensely researched the history and the details of the car. Every time I saw a '59 Mini I spend hours crawling through it, and I have spoken with lots of other Mini restorers and experts on the subject. The whole thing became self driving so to speak. When you find that the original wiper blades for a November 1959 Mini were made by a company named Rainbow you just start looking for New Old Stock Rainbow parts. Almost legendary is the glass washer bottle which commands prices of £500 in '1959 circles', but I managed to get mine from Florida where I paid 'only' \$125. There is the rumour that they sold mixed pickles in an identical bottle in Israel, and some early-Mini fans are contemplating a 'treasure hunting holiday' there.

Some parts are available as good quality reproductions, such as the wicker baskets under the rear seats or the horn push button. Other replicas are nowhere close to the original: "If you know that the repro choke pulley is several millimetre bigger in diameter than the original, then you don't want to live with that and start looking for the real thing. For me this hunt for the right parts is part of the fun – Moments like the one where I found the correct interior trim at a Mini meeting in England and tied it onto the roof of my Wolseley Hornet."

Almost eight years took this hunt for parts by now, most of all is now ready, and there are some rare extras. The chassis is the next item on the list; another years hard work and the Morris could run again. Sellin is not really in a rush as the search for parts still continues. A 1959 rad would be nice: "The upper housing is a bit 'boxier' on the early ones." But the man from near Kiel in northern

Germany is optimistic and plans to swap it for an early Cooper-S rad, which he happened to “net” during his quest for parts...

“Ancient” Mini facts (Blue text box)

The fans: 17,749 Austin and Morris Mini were made in the first year 1959, and 109 are known to exist today by the English 1959 Mini Register (www.1959miniregister.com). The register offers an umbrella for restorers and historians; where information is collected and provided for all. If you want to know in which week in October 1959 the floorpan was modified in the area of the starter switch; this is the portal to find out.

A downsized version of the info is also available in German on the website of our restorer (www.classic-minis.de), and there is also a email contact form. The market value... ..of a Mini of the first year is difficult to establish. Even cars which realistically are beyond economical repair can represent a considerable value if certain parts are present and in good condition, i.e. the aforementioned screen washer bottle. For cars in reasonably good condition collectors have to be prepared to pay something in the € 20.000 area, tendency more up than down...

Pictures (left to right) page 74:

- a) 1959 chassis differences: The a-panel is single layer...
- b) ...the drain holes in the gutter are tiny, and there is no recess for the rubber on the window frame.

Pictures (up/down) page 75:

- a) Always on the hunt: Since eight years Sellin is doing his forensics. The unambiguous glass bottle in the background can fetch up to £500 in England....
- b) The next step: The restoration of the shell is carried out by a specialist workshop as a winter project.