

Heritage

by Joe Sage

The 2015 MINI John Cooper Works Hardtop was revealed at the Detroit show a year ago, featuring the most powerful engine ever installed in a MINI production model, and went on sale last spring. The car is unchanged for 2016. Tuned for track—and road—performance, this is the first JCW MINI sharing BMW global front-wheel-drive architecture. Powered by a MINI TwinPower turbo four-cylinder engine, the car has sport exhaust, adapted suspension and aerodynamic features.

MINI always bears a lot of heritage, evoking decades' worth of small car fun and function, with the JCW versions also evoking the brand's race and rally background. Now bearing more BMW DNA than ever, it also bears that brand's heritage of a lack of inclusions that make the price quickly climb well beyond the stated base—our \$30,000 car quickly became a \$40,000 car, including about

\$3000 for sporty details it seems should already be on any JCW, and it still did not include a back-up camera. Eight out of 10 paint choices cost \$500 or \$1000 extra, including ours at the high end.

BMW comes late to front-wheel drive, though MINI has had it all along, so we would think the heritage of unwanted torquey front-drive, lane-defying dart-and-weave behavior could have been engineered out by now. But it's there in a big way.

Its heritage of tiny size remains, visually, but the cars have grown and grown since their modern reintroduction. This is not all bad, as we found it capable of holding a decent amount of luggage or an impressive volume of daily goods, even with rear seats up—and there's much more room with those down. (We're still surprised at the car's relatively cumbersome turning circle for its size.)

The MINI JCW remains generally fun behind the wheel, so it's a small car you'll never get tired of driving. On the downside, it has several flaws you'll never stop being annoyed by—BMW heritage also explains the maddeningly finicky turn signal indicator, locks and mirror controls. Every

SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ENGINE / DRIVETRAIN..... | 2.0L turbo 4-cyl / FWD |
| HORSEPOWER/TORQUE..... | 228 hp / 236 lb-ft |
| TRANSMISSION..... | Sport auto (6-spd manual stand.) |
| WEIGHT..... | 2845 lb |
| CARGO VOLUME..... | 8.7 cu.ft. / 34.0 cu.ft. |
| TURNING CIRCLE..... | 35.4 ft |
| MPG..... | 25/31/28 city/hwy/comb |

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| BASE PRICE | \$30,600 |
| JCW REBEL GREEN PAINT | 1000 |
| COLD WEATHER PACKAGE: Power-folding mirrors, heated front seats..... | 650 |
| PREMIUM PACKAGE: Keyless entry, pano moonroof, storage package, harman/kardon audio..... | 1800 |
| WIRED PACKAGE | 1750 |
| WHEELS: 18" JCW Cup spoke two-tone | 750 |
| SPORT AUTOMATIC TRANSMISSION | 1500 |
| DYNAMIC DAMPER CONTROL..... | 500 |
| HOOD STRIPES..... | 100 |
| SATELLITE RADIO..... | 300 |
| DESTINATION CHARGE..... | 850 |
| TOTAL | \$39,800 |

one of them could have had a simple engineering fix. We hope they're working on that. It does have a far better shift lever than BMW. And a much cooler keyless start switch than any other, which will always put a smile on your face. ■

