

Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em

Our tastes change when we grow up and, thankfully, Lucy MacKenzie put her childhood dislike for her mum's 1966 Austin Mini Cooper behind her and restored it back to its former glory.

Words: Stephen Davy-Osborne. Photos: Jim Jupp.



If you had told architect Lucy MacKenzie five years ago that she would one day be cancelling a very important meeting with clients, because she was down on her hands and knees scrabbling about on the carpets of her mother's Mini in search of the button that had popped out the end of the handbrake, she probably would not have believed you. That Mini, and its handbrake, caused quite enough agro for Lucy while she was growing up, without making a reappearance in her adult life.

The Island Blue and Old English White Mini Cooper in question has been in Lucy's family for longer than she has. It was bought for her mother,

Jane Turner, when new in 1966. It was supplied by a garage just a stone's throw away from the family house, Aberdeen Motors Ltd. When the Mini first arrived on the scene it changed everything in a world that was already changing fast. The arrival of this particular Mini at Jane's family, in the far flung North East of Scotland, was no exception. The spritely Cooper soon became a potent symbol of the newly divorced Jane's independence, getting her away from the kitchen sink and out to the countryside and the seaside with her kids.

"My late mother used to take my four brothers and sisters on trips, to Stonehaven mainly I think, when they were young. I came

a fair bit later," explains Lucy. "I remember my sister saying that on one of these trips the four of them were sat in the car at the top of a hill while my mother had gone to run an errand and my brother started playing with all the levers and knobs – not that there are many – and he let the hand brake off. Apparently my mother, and a bunch of men who saw this Mini rolling down the hill, all ran after the car to try and stop it before it hit something! Luckily they did, for my brothers and sisters and the Mini!"

With such a narrow escape, it was a wonder that the Mini was still in one piece by the time Lucy arrived on the scene in the late 1970s, and



Wooden dashboard was fitted by the dealer when the Cooper was new.



Even the heater was stripped and repainted by hand.



Lucy has childhood memories of the Mini's vinyl seats, especially on a hot day. The original seats scrubbed up well.

there were certainly occasions when she wished that it wasn't. "I remember I dreaded the car on a hot day," she said. "The smell hit you first, when the door opened, and then you were lucky to not need a skin graft after your bare skin hit the vinyl seats. Being young it was all shorts and burnt legs for me! Apparently when we used to be in the car for longer drives I sat in the back saying 'ill, ill, ill'. Factor in that my mother wasn't always the best driver, and this only added to my car sickness as we kangaroo-hopped along in the lower gears."

"But I wouldn't say that my childhood memories of the car were bad as such; I liked cars, I just didn't like being car sick, getting stuck to the seats or that waft of hot air when you opened the car on a hot day and had to climb in the back when touching anything seemed to take your skin off!"

By the mid-80s the Mini was starting to break down quite a lot and it gradually became less practical and reliable. It was stored away in the family garage, under a dust sheet, where it was largely forgotten about. In late 2008 Lucy's nine year old Nissan Micra suffered the same fate as many a car in North East Scotland and rusted away to nothing with just 32,000 miles on the clock.

The search was on for a suitable replacement, one which was practical for the congested streets of modern day Aberdeen, but also provided a bit of fun on the roads of the highlands at

weekends, maybe even for a wee trip to the seaside, too. After listing her demands, Lucy realised that she had just described a car that she knew all too well. Before considering the option seriously she would have to put an entire childhood of travel sickness behind her.

In the intervening years she had become a practicing architect so, when the dust sheet was finally pulled off the Mini, Lucy's keen eye for design confirmed what she already knew: that this was the car for her. "I have always loved seeing classic cars and, as an architect, we are always looking at good design, lines and function. The Mini couldn't be better designed aesthetically so that contributed to it. My husband William's late father had a great love of cars. Most that his family had back then would be classics of all sorts now so he certainly was keen to have a classic car himself too."

The Mini was still all in one piece, never having left the garage in 20 years, as confirmed by the tax disc still in the windscreen from 1986. It had even managed to survive a number of garage parties, thrown by Lucy in her teenage years, completely unscathed. It was clear from the outset that there would be a lot of work involved if the Mini were ever to move along the tarmac of its own accord. "The bodywork had suffered from condensation in the garage, making it rusty in the wrong places, and the clutch had seized »



Lucy with husband William.

Lucy MacKenzie

- » **Have you any pets?** Muffpuff, Bap and Kindling (cats)
- » **Single or hooked up?** Married to William
- » **Dream job?** Egyptologist
- » **What would you do if you won the lottery?** Find the VW camper van which my dad bought new in the early 70s and do that up too
- » **Tea or Coffee?** Strong black coffee.
- » **Snickers or Mars Bar?** Marathon!
- » **What's your music of the moment?** Muse, but my taste is varied
- » **Favourite drink?** Champagne, single malt whisky
- » **Favourite Mini suppliers?** Mini Spares Centre, M-Machine.
- » **Are you a member of any clubs?** Aberdeen Mini Owners Club (AMOC)
- » **Big engine or big ICE?** Neither. Small car, small and loud engine. Big entertainment is all in the driving.

“My dad had been rolling it back and fore, though, as he had intended it to still be towable to take to the scrapyard...”

totally,” Lucy recalls. “My dad had been rolling it back and fore, though, as he had intended it to still be towable to take to the scrap yard for skipping.” Luckily Jane had never allowed this.

The couple took their time in deciding their course of action. As the Cooper had been idle for the past 22 years another couple of months were hardly going to do any further harm. Lucy and William considered what they wanted for the Mini. They were under no illusions that this was a project that they could undertake themselves as their first project.

“It would have been great to be able to say we had done it ourselves but the level of skill needed to do it properly was well beyond us. We aren’t mechanics, so doing it ourselves would have just been too much for us, especially as it had been sitting so long. We wanted it to be as original as it could be, whilst showing its age, so we didn’t want to stick on a pile of bright new chrome work or soup it up. We had spoken to a few people beforehand and they were talking about more of a ‘tart up’ with filler, which was not what we wanted. We had even spoken to bigger companies down south, as there seems to be a lot more outfits that way, but it was a bit far away and we wanted to be able to visit in a day round trip ideally.”

Lucy and William were clear from the outset that the Mini was to be restored nut and bolt, as

though it had just left the show room at Aberdeen Motors Ltd. 42 years earlier, but they were adamant that it should not become a museum piece that never saw a drop of rain. That was not what the car had been intended for when it had first been bought. The couple met with Simon Drew from The Mini Works in Edinburgh, after seeing some of his restorations at the Aberdeen Mini Owners Club summer show, and they were further impressed with his interest in keeping the authenticity of the Mini, and his warning that there would be no short-cuts in a project of this size.

“We probably took about six months to a year to establish who was going to do the work. It has so much sentimental value, we couldn’t have handed it over to anybody and we also felt we had a duty to treat it well, being the age it is.” The Mini was duly named Ringo, in honour of the band topping the charts when it had first left the production line, and was packed off down



Remember your first Mini? Here are Lucy's brother and sister in the 1960s, about to start another adventure made possible by mum Jane's new Cooper.

to Edinburgh for work to commence: stripping it down and prepping for the restoration. With the project well under way, Ringo became affectionately known as Ringo MP (for money pit) as the cost of restoration increased. The couple were adamant that if the job was to be done, there was no point in cutting corners.

Sticking to the original specification, the only modifications that were permitted were limited to the conversion to an unleaded head, a 0.020-inch overbore of the 998 engine and Cooper S

brakes during the refurbishment. To the credit of the upholsterers on Ringo MP's Longbridge production line, the interior had fared rather well over the years, and everything except the carpets was still in good enough condition to be retained. Lucy was very impressed by this, especially considering the bashing the inside of the cabin took over the years of service in a family with five children. “All of my siblings and me would have been sick in that car in the 60s, 70s and 80s, luckily vinyl is wipe-clean. Simon wasn't so impressed with this: a lot of years and a lot of sick.”

With a bit of age, things like car sickness tend to fade, and Lucy had hoped that sticking to the seats would be just a distant childhood memory along with her travel sickness, but to her amusement she has found this is not so. “Sometimes your top works its way up just so your back sticks to the seat, I can just get over it, though, as the Mini overcompensates in so many other different ways!”

As work on Ringo MP approached completion, his original owner, Jane, became very ill. “She loved the car so was really pleased when we took it on, as she had lots of nostalgic memories of it,” says Lucy. “The Mini had always seemed to represent a sense of freedom for her. She also liked to hear about our trips in it at the weekends and at shows when it was back on the road, although she wasn't able to come out for a run in it being too ill by then.”

In August 2012, Jane passed away. But Lucy and William were determined for one final hurrah »



The Mini was named after the drummer of The Beatles, a popular beat combo back in the 60s.



Edinburgh based The Mini works was chosen for this hugely sentimental project. The crocodile (don't call it an alligator) is from William's childhood.



New carpets were fitted, while all other original interior fixtures and fittings were retained.



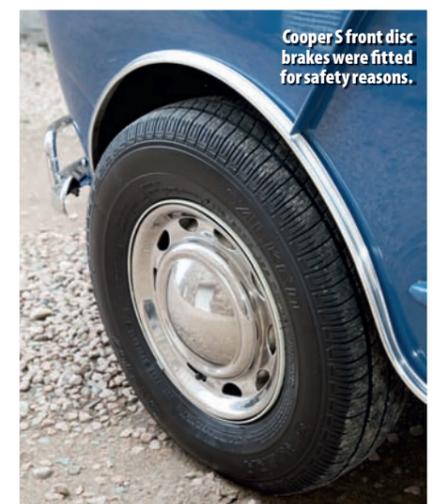
The seats lasted well despite the car being used to run Jane's kids around.



Lovely new coats of Island Blue and Old English White.



Aftermarket fuel cap is one of few mods on this Mini, although the head has been modified to run unleaded fuel.



Cooper S front disc brakes were fitted for safety reasons.



Coopers had bright alloy door pocket kick plates but would usually have had vinyl check straps.



Irvin lap and diagonal seat belts.



Foot-operated headlamp dip switch on the floor.

"I have always been a believer in the journey, not in the arriving, and the Mini is always about the driving."

for Jane and her Mini. "We took the car to her funeral, which she would have liked, although I have to say driving very slowly in a cortege behind the hearse is not the type of driving a Mini likes. We were beginning to overheat while all the other cars were appropriately quiet and there we were revving away noisily in low gears."

But since taking on their first classic vehicle, they haven't looked back. "We hadn't realised there are a fair few classic cars on the road and the community is great. You always get a wave or flash and we have discovered that Mini lights are in reality for flashing other Minis or classic cars as the sealed beam units are more mood lighting than actual lighting at night."

Of course, there were a few teething problems that came with running in a recently restored car, so Lucy and William have learnt first-hand that owning a Mini is not all plain sailing. First the starter motor seized and the AA was called to come and get things moving again. "They turned up within 10 minutes of being called, with two vans as they wanted to see the car!" laughs Lucy. "The driver's side windscreen wiper also keeps

throwing itself off suicidally when used in the rain. We have gone through two now and are onto our third. Maybe it is best to drive in the dry!"

A big adjustment that had to be made was getting used to being that much closer to the road and all the issues low-hanging exhausts and number plates cause for Mini owners in a world where speed bumps seem to increase in size in-line with inflation. "We had a bollard at work which needed to be driven over and I kept hitting the number plate off." Needless to say this was disposed of by myself rather quickly, or rather I loosened the bolts to investigate it and having left a couple off, someone came and nicked it for the scrap! I haven't had any major issues with speed bumps so far, although I'd be all for getting rid of some of the alpine monsters found in Aberdeen!"

Not forgetting the fate of the Micra due to the salt covered winter roads of Aberdeenshire, a sensible 'winter car' was also sourced in the shape of a Citroen C1, to protect Ringo MP from the harsh northern winters, but there's no doubting which is the favourite in this family. "Modern cars lack any real character, even the

good looking ones, and reliability is overrated. I have always been a believer in the journey, not in the arriving, and the Mini is always about the driving. There have been a few times, after we got the Mini back, when driving our modern car and we thought it had stalled as it just doesn't make broom-ing noises."

And as for the handbrake button? "Well, despite finding it and putting it back in, it kept happening. So I bought those caterpillar balloons with smiley faces and two antennas and put it over the end which held it in place very well until we sourced a new handbrake!"

Lucy dedicates this feature to: her late mother, Jane Turner, 1937-2012.

Lucy would like to thank: Simon Drew (assisted by Kevin) at The Mini Works, whose knowledge and attention to detail were essential in making this happen; Craig Pittendrigh of CP Autoservices, Newmachar for helping us out on the day to day maintenance; Jim King of Autotune for balancing and tuning.



There's no point hiding in the back streets in this eye-catching beauty.



47 years on but the AA is still needed on occasion to offer assistance.



Single A-pillar mounted mirror.

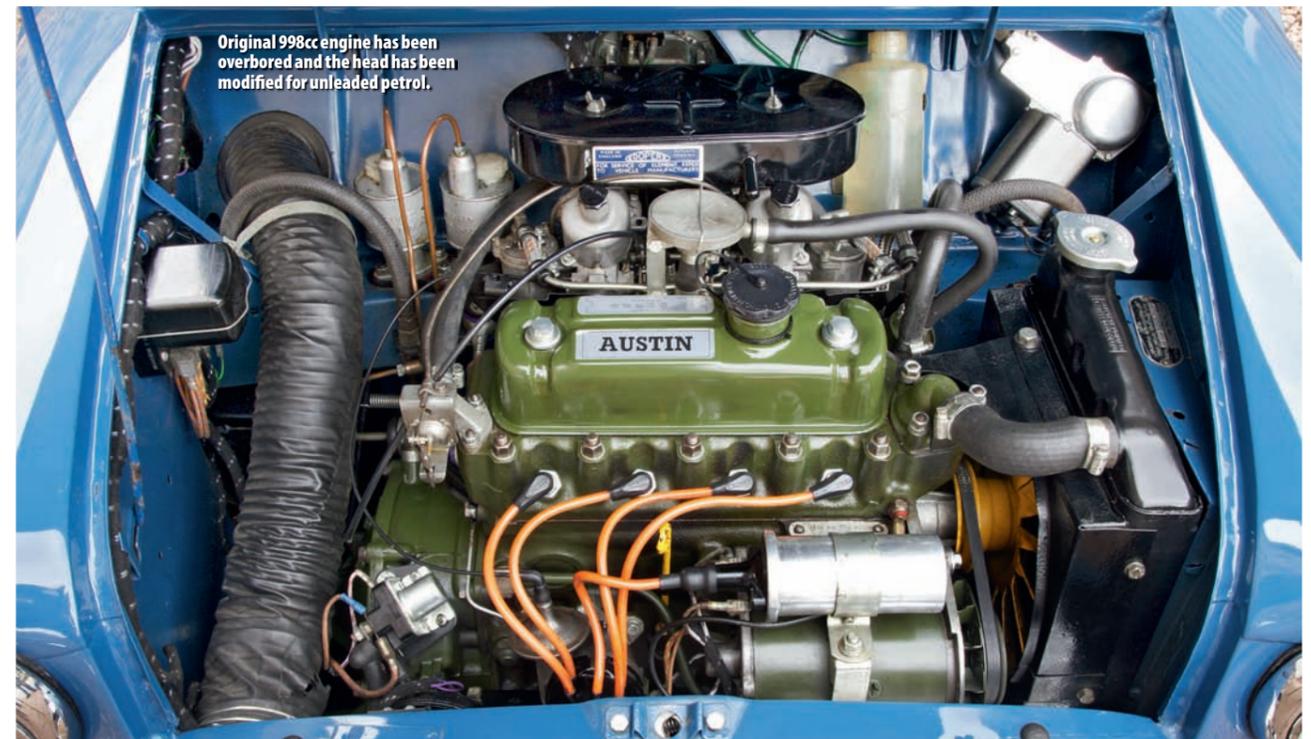
Technical Specification

Restored 1966 Mk1 Austin Cooper

- ▶ **Engine:** Original 998 bored +0.020-inch. 12G295 cylinder head, unleaded seats. Hepolite Powermax pistons, rings. twin 1¼-inch SU carburetors
- ▶ **Gearbox:** Standard manual 22G68. 4 helical forward gears. standard 3.76:1 final drive ratio
- ▶ **Suspension:** Refurbished original Cooper Hydrolastic suspension
- ▶ **Brakes:** Converted to Cooper S 7.5-inch front discs. rear drums
- ▶ **Wheels/Tyres:** 3.5x10-inch steel wheels. Falken Sincera SN807 145/80R10. hub caps
- ▶ **Interior:** Standard smiths clocks and dials, 100mph speedo. Irvin lap and diagonal seat belts. grey carpets. original blue/gold brocade vinyl seats. wooden dash fitted as optional extra by original dealer, Aberdeen Motors Ltd.
- ▶ **Exterior:** Island blue (BU08)/Old English White (WT3) two-pack paint. restored by The Mini Works. Stadium overtaking mirror on A-pillar. Lucas sealed beam headlights



Enjoying yet another seaside trip to Stonehaven. The Cooper is still on Hydrolastic suspension.



Original 998cc engine has been overbored and the head has been modified for unleaded petrol.



A rare occasion where the boot is not filled with camping gear. This Mini is used and enjoyed.



Coventry radiator is still present.