

OPEN-AIR MINI



THE 2016 MINI CONVERTIBLE HAS A FEW CHANGES—
ALL FOR THE BETTER.

BY BILL SIURU

The third-generation 2016 Mini Convertible will start appearing in U.S. Mini dealer showrooms starting in March. It will be available first in Cooper and Cooper S versions, but there will undoubtedly be a John Cooper Works version of the Convertible, since there is already a JWC Mini Hardtop—and spy shots have captured a JWC Convertible being tested at the Nürburgring.

These are the first open-top Minis powered by the BMW Group's latest modular engines. With individual cylinder displacement of 500 cc, the Mini mills feature Twin-Power turbo technology, which means that they are turbocharged

and use direct fuel injection. The new Convertible is also the first drop-top to use BMW's new front-wheel-drive platform.

Like the recently introduced Mini Hardtop, the Cooper version is powered by a 1,499-cc in-line three-cylinder engine, while the Cooper S gets a 1,998-cc in-line four. The Cooper engine is rated at 134 horsepower at 4,400 rpm, with 162 pound-feet of torque available at 1,250. The engine in the Cooper S is rated at 189 horsepower at 5,000 rpm, and delivers 207 pound-feet of torque at 1,250.

Here comes the fun: Both come with an efficient six-speed manual transmission as standard equipment; a smooth, quick-shifting six-speed Steptronic automatic transmission is optional. Like other new Mini models, the automatic transmission will be mated to the Mini's navigation system, so shift points are appropriately selected to match the imminent road situation—for an example, an upcoming corner or intersection. (One step closer to autonomous driving....)

With a curb weight at around the 3,000-pound mark, the Mini Convertible

is about 200 pounds heavier than the Mini Hardtop. The added weight comes from beefing up the Convertible in the front and rear underbody, doorsills, and beneath the engine. Insulation has also been added to help make the cabin quieter at highway speeds. This means slightly less spritely performance compared to the Mini Hardtop, especially with the 1.5-liter three-cylinder engine. But perhaps that penalty is easily compensated for by the ability to drive while fully enjoying the sun's rays. The new Mini convertible grew a bit, too: It's about three inches longer, and two inches wider than its predecessor. Its longer wheelbase—by 1.1 inches—results in a bit more room inside. The fabric



An easy-load trunk and a load-through door make the cargo space both accessible and functional.



roof still has multi-way top settings, including a sunroof option that enables the soft top to open midway for just the right amount of sun and air, sort of like the old British coupes de ville. A rigid frame and invisible roll bar enhance safety. Pyrotechnic rollover bars eliminate the need for the previous hoops behind the rear headrests. Oh, and let's not forget Mini's quirky Always Open timer, a device that counts the number of hours you've driven with the top down. There is even an optional decorative top with an embroidered Union Jack with herringbone-patterned detailing; it's difficult to photograph that top properly, but Mini fans who saw it at the LA Auto Show say they'd definitely check that box. Fully electric and automated roof operation can be done at speeds up to 18 mph, and it takes a mere 18 seconds. The trunk lid still flips down, just as the boot

lid in the original Mini. The base of the folding soft top can also be lifted to help load larger items, and the cargo area can now hold a bit more luggage.

All Mini Cooper and Cooper S Convertibles will come standard with the Mini Connected infotainment system, including a 6.5-inch high-resolution screen. In addition, an optional larger 8.8-inch display includes navigation, and there is a rain-warning app that alerts the driver when it might be prudent to put the top up.

As with the Mini Hardtop, the convertible is offered with options like adjustable shocks, variable drive modes, adaptive cruise control, a head-up display, collision mitigation, parking assistance, and more. (Does the idea of parking assistance for a Mini boggle the mind?)

Like all other Mini models, the new Mini Convertible is made for individualization. For example, there will be a choice of eleven exterior colors, including classic Caribbean Aqua, a color that was available on the original Mini. Inside the car, premium seat-upholstery options include a new Malt Brown leather with diamond stitching like that used on classic English Chesterfield sofas.

As a point of history, BMC never officially offered a Mini drop-top coupe; early Mini cabriolets were built by aftermarket coachbuilders. When Rover took over from BMC, it started offering a Mini Cabriolet in 1993 that was based on convertible conversions done by Lamm Autohaus in Germany. The new Mini made its debut in 2001 as a hatchback, but a Mini Convertible did not appear until the 2006 model year. **R**



While the Mini Cooper convertible hasn't changed much since it was introduced in 2005, it is a vastly different car than the Rover Mini Convertible of 1996.