



Test Drive

In Da Club, Man

In the **MINI COOPER S CLUBMAN** there's room for man's best friend, friends and your golf clubs

Words: Ivan Smith

Take a look at your average car ads. What do they mean? Smug-looking male models race along impossibly empty roads; happy celebrities leap in the air... Car companies don't want you to buy a car, they want you to embrace a lifestyle.

But of all the auto companies who want to amp up your life, Mini is the one that really seems to mean it. Buy a Mini and you really do want to be a bit different. Buy a Mini and the road might even feel that little bit more open.

When Mini was English, your car was small and a bit fun, but also kind of crappy; now it's owned by BMW, and boy are those Germans serious about fun? They've even sent me a sticker that says "Do not stare at my boot," and if that doesn't prove it, what does?

With the Mini Cooper, the company told you to get your girl and your weekend bag and

take off on a whizzy, slot-car adventure. With the Clubman, it wants you to have your cake and eat it. Yes, you can have your jollies, but now you can take a friend, his dog Ripper and all your golf clubs.

The Clubman is that oddity: the long Mini. From the front, through to the first third, it's a normal Mini - after that, it's a wagon with an extra door.

This door is the real double-take feature: it's what, back in the day, they called a "suicide" door, because of its rear-hinge. Although Mini would prefer

"The Clubman is like driving a go-kart, one with luggage space."

you called it a "Clubdoor" now, not least because these days you can't just open the thing and tumble under a semi.

Situated behind the driver's door, which you have to open first, the Clubdoor is the first sign that something's up. Once it's open, you can actually get in the back, where you can breathe and move about. The Clubman is under 4m, but due to a longer wheelbase there's an extra 8cm available over the hatchback. You won't get three Sydney Kings centres in there, but my 1.83m frame manages it no problem.

Being a "wagon" means twin rear doors, which give you a bit more space to load your stuff into a boot that looks darn close to roomy. The downside is that the view through the back isn't very good.

These extra litres inside add about 100kg extra weight, but don't seem to make much difference to the performance. In the turbocharged S version, acceleration from 0-100km/h is half a second slower than the equivalent hatchback's 7.1secs. You can pull the trigger on your slot-car gun and the Clubman still goes.

The modern Mini is a wonderfully sticky car, and the Clubman is no different - you can abuse it on tight corners, and it'll come out the other side looking great. The acceleration is still a thrill, too: this car is a pocket rocket. It's usually the big, quiet cars where you have to keep an eye on the speedo, but lose concentration here and you'll pick up a ticket.

It's like driving a go-kart - a go-kart with luggage space and happy passengers, not to mention a whole bunch of funky features, such as stability control; a remarkable package. I want to buy into this lifestyle and I don't mind the feeling. I still won't leap in the air, though.

The Specs
Engine: 1.6-litre turbocharged four-cylinder
Power: 128kW/5500rpm
Acceleration: 0-100km/h in 7.6secs

Weight: 1205kg
Economy: 7 litres per 100km
Little extras: Stability control; hill-start assist; six air-bags; split rear seats; "sport" button for increased responsiveness; park-distance control
Price: \$43,200

MOTOR SHOW



Subaru Forester

Out Now

Subi's brilliant SUV is back, with more kit, more space, higher ground clearance and better looks. A five-star safety rating, stability control across the range and improved fuel economy will appeal to responsible drivers, while the rest of us enjoy the 4.1 per cent power hike in the 2.5-litre XS model and low-down torque in the turbocharged XT. **From \$30,490**



VW Scirocco

Coming Soon

Sadly, the on-road version has strayed somewhat from the gorgeous concept, but the new incarnation of VW's legendary two-door is still something to behold. Affordable, hi-tech, cheap to run and a hoot to drive, the new Scirocco could well be the People's Coupé. VW have yet to decide whether it will come to Oz. **\$37,000 (est)**



Lotus Exige GT3

You Wish

Say what you like about the Poms, they know how to tinker with an engine. To create the 2008 GT Championship GT3 Lotus boffins squeezed 261kW out of a road Exige's 1.8-litre power plant; that's a whopping 148kW per litre (a Porsche 997 GT3 whoppers 83kW per litre). It's also the fastest ever Lotus, capable of 320km/h. **N/A**



Hyundai iMode Concept

What The...

Want a home entertainment system on wheels? This Korean six-seater is made of lightweight plastics and is coated in magic paint that makes scratches disappear. iMode allows access to the web, music, movies and video games via drop-down touch screens. Expect disastrous confusion between actual driving and playing *Gran Turismo*. **Price: unknown**