



ON THE JOB

Words Jeff Ruggles Photography Matt Woods

Cooper collector

Having been a Mini fan for 25 years, Jonathan Bown has finally found an Austin Cooper 970 S after years of searching. With a little help from Paul Preston Mini Restoration, he's aiming for all-out perfection...

Some may disagree, but for the majority, it's the Mk1 Cooper S that's top of the tree in Mini circles. You've got the purity, the incredible motorsport heritage and a brilliant reminder of the swinging '60s all rolled together in one world-beating package. And when it comes to the Mk1 S range, the Holy Grail has to be the ultra-coveted 970cc version.

When the Cooper S first appeared in March 1963, it was powered by a 1071cc A-Series. Initially intended as a run of 1000 cars to homologate it for racing, just over 4000 cars were actually built over the 17-month production period. Despite its sweet-running engine however, the 1071 was really only an interim model. BMC had always intended to develop long and short stroke versions of the S motor to suit the

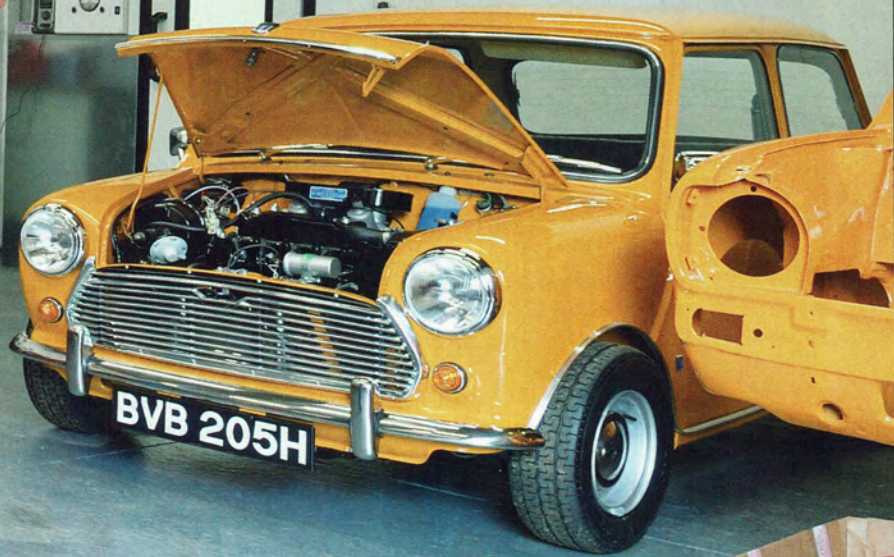
popular 1000cc and 1300cc racing classes, and with the obsolescence of the 1100cc class, it got cracking. The 1275 S would go on to be a production model until 1971, but the short-stroke 970 S was really only put into production for homologation purposes. Just 963 examples (a fraction short of the intended 1000) were built between June '64 and April '65. It was very competitive, but many were later converted with bigger engines, making survivors extremely rare.

One man who knows all about their rarity is Jonathan Bown. He's been a Mini fan for 25 years, having owned countless examples in that time. But things got a little more serious when he began running his own business aged 27, and the current fleet includes a 1275 S named Hamish and a recently purchased 1071 S – both Austins as Jonathan admits he won't buy a Morris! He

also has a Mk3 S that recently won its concours category at Stanford Hall, but a 970 S has proved elusive – until now. "I've been looking for a very long time," he says. "I think there are less than 100 left now."

Jonathan's Mk3 was purchased and rebuilt via Paul Preston Mini Restoration, and impressed with the result, he's entrusted the 970 to Paul too. It was purchased as a running car with an MoT, but that won't do for Jonathan. He has a clear remit for Paul, and that's to build the best car he's ever done. Aside from a couple of essentials such as hardened valve seats for unleaded fuel, the car will be rebuilt as closely as possible to factory spec. And having already scooped a trophy with his Mk3 S, Jonathan will be hoping for more of the same. The National Mini Cooper Day at Beaulieu is the target, and we can't wait to see the completed car. ➔

Paul in his pristine workshop, with Jonathan's 970 S sitting partially stripped on the ramp.



"He has a clear remit for Paul, and that's to build the best car he's ever done..."



PROJECT PROFILE

THE OWNER

NAME: Jonathan Bown
AGE: 42
LOCATION: Bedfordshire

THE CAR:

CAR: 1964 Austin Cooper 970 S
START CONDITION: Running, MoT'd example
CONDITION NOW: Bodysell mostly stripped
TIME TAKEN SO FAR: Two days!
ESTIMATED TIME OF COMPLETION: Beautieu 2017

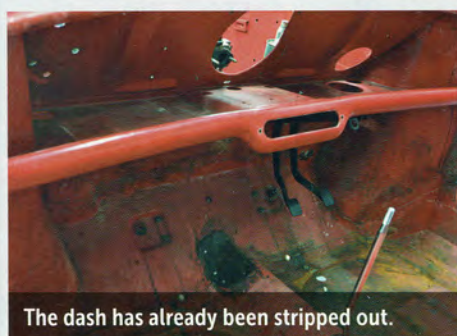
Jonathan's Mk3 S is a stunner.



Paul's paint booth is on site, and so was this lovely Clubby.



The car is by no means a rust-bucket, but blasting will reveal all...



The dash has already been stripped out.

So Jonathan, How did you get into Minis in the first place?

It's been a passion since I was a kid. My dad had always owned Minis, and my bother was a couple of years older and had a Mini. So I had one as my first car, which my Dad paid £35 for. That was 25 years ago. We did a bit of work to it, got it going and starting using it. I went through about nine, just one after another, because they were not that good. There was a garage just down the road from where I grew up, which is still there now. Back in the early '90s every time a Mini rocked up as a part-ex the guy in there, who's unfortunately since passed away, would call us up and say 'I've got this one for £200, do you fancy it?' We just kept on buying them. The one that was roughest was purple, and had

The car came with Rose Petals, four-pot callipers and a regular steel spare - these will be changed.



This was a running car, but some of the details, such as the numberplate brackets, are incorrect. These will be rectified.

mould inside. It was a horrible car, but was the only one that never broke down! We had that in the family for about four years – they're fantastic cars. I love them.

When did the collection get more serious?

The real story there was that my dad was in the police force, and went to serve a warrant on someone for missing court. He chased them through the house as they ran away, came into the garage, and there were two Ss and one Cooper in there. There was no way of getting out so the guy had to go to court, but while he was there Dad asked if anything was for sale. He ended up buying an S, and bought me a Cooper. I should have kept it because it was a 997. Then I started my own business when I was 27, and as soon as I started making some money I started collecting them.

When did the first Cooper S arrive?

I stumbled across one about 10 years ago, a Morris Cooper 1275 S. I hate Morris to be honest – I just don't like the badges – but I loved the car so I bought it. I sold it at the Silverstone Auctions, then I bumped into one of the 1275

cars I have now, called Hamish. He's a red and black Austin 1275 S, 1967. Then at that point, it changed. One wasn't enough, and the quality had to be there.

So how did you find out about Paul, and end up buying his Mk3 S?

That was by accident. I saw Paul advertising on eBay, went on his main site, and saw where it said that he was the proud owner of a 998 Cooper and a Mk3 Cooper S awaiting restoration. I rung him up – he answered even though he was on holiday – and asked him if the Mk3 was for sale. 'Could be', he replied. Then I asked if it was Bronze Yellow, and when I found out it was, I agreed to buy it over the phone there and then. That was how I met Paul.

How did you find the 970?

I was laying by the pool on holiday in Dubai, had just finished playing in the water with my kids and saw it on the Car and Classic site. It had been on it for less than 20 minutes. I rang up, put a deposit on and my dad went to look at it. I paid in full the next day, and when I got home it was sat on my driveway.



The interior looks OK, but will likely be replaced.



The next stage will be to remove the engine and subframes, then get the shell blasted.

What state was it in?

Jonathan: It was a good, useable car with about a week's MoT left on it. I took for another test and it passed first time, so I drove it to Stanford Hall. I then had it back home for another three days before it went up to Paul's. The original plan had been to wait until 2018, but then you guys called and said you wanted photographs...

Paul: It looked in fairly good shape, it just showed a few tell-tale signs of needing restoration work. However, the car was far from what Jonathan would expect out of it. He wants it like a brand new car.

So what's the remit for the car?

Jonathan: My remit to Paul was for it to be the best car he's ever done. I'm extremely fussy and he knows that. We can pick fault with the Mk3 so that shows the level we will go to. We're not

compromising on anything. It has to be the best that physically you can build.

And you were happy to go back to Paul?

Jonathan: Paul's as good a restorer as anyone, if not better. He can build any car, he just needs the budget, and from me, he'll have the budget not to compromise. It's not an open chequebook, and it's not like Paul's new house is being built on the back of this car, but it's not done on a shoestring.

The car arrived with Rose Petals and four-pot callipers. Will you be keeping these?

Jonathan: No, it has to be original and legit, just as it rocked out of BMC. No flashes, no whistles. I think between 1964 and 1970, BMC just got things right. Like The Beatles, it was the right moment for it. So any one who can take that history, embrace it and put it back to what it was originally means the car can last my generation and hopefully more generations. It's a British-built car, and I just think that history needs to stay – I don't like to mess with these things.

So what's the next step?

Paul: We'll take the engine out, subframes out, and strip it so it's a bare shell. It then goes off to be blasted, we'll put it into an epoxy primer

while we are working on it, then we'll do all the relevant panel work.


Do you envisage much panel work?

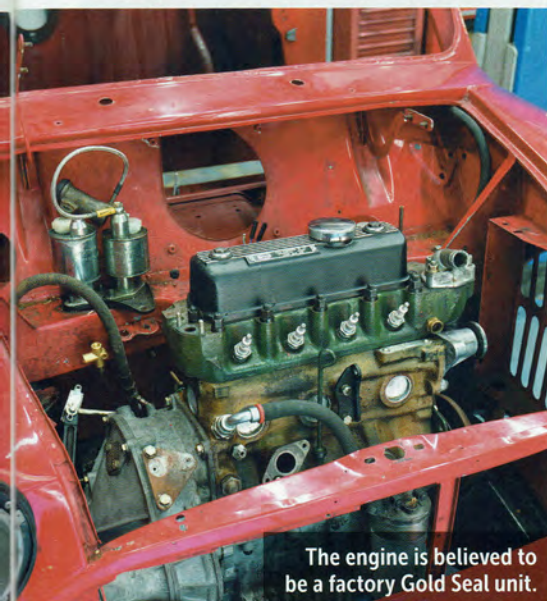
Paul: The usual. Probably inner and outer sills, front end, doorskins, rear valance etc. Once we've done all the panel work, any bits of original metal we will strip bare again then re-epoxy. We'll obviously make sure there's no swarf anywhere, then it will go to the final prep stages for paint. We'll buy a new Heritage rear subframe, but that will be rubbed down and gloss-blackened. It will then be assembled with a new interior, and the engine reworked.

When are you hoping to have it done by?

Jonathan: Beaulieu is the aim, but that will be determined by what happens when the shell is blasted. Sometimes they can look great, but it's a different story after blasting. Paul has told me that it looks good, so we'll see. It would be great to win at Stanford Hall, and be at the NEC.

And will that be it for the collection?

Jonathan: I've just bought a 1071 S to do this time next year, and I'm desperate to find a MkII. I'd also love to do a '59. And I want an August '59, which is going to be really tough to find. I know where there is one and he will sell it, but it's a Morris... 



The engine is believed to be a factory Gold Seal unit.



A new headliner will also be required.

FINISHED SPEC

COLOUR: Tartan Red, black roof

ENGINE: Gold Seal 970 S engine, rebuilt

GEARBOX: Standard original four-speed manual

SUSPENSION: Refurbished subframes, standard spec

BRAKES: Cooper S discs (front), drums (rear)

WHEELS: 4.5x10-inch Cooper S steel rims

INTERIOR: Standard spec but with all new parts