# THE 40-YEAR ITCH...

## Martin Grewcock is a latecomer to Minis but he was keen to make up for lost time by building his Rover Cooper into a trophy-winning stunner.

**Words and photos:** Jim Jupp.

Martin Grewcock had always fancied owning a Mini. Heading toward his fourth decade the urge was too great to ignore. "My mate had one when I was 17 and I didn't. I had a Nova! I always wanted one so, when I reached 40, I decided that was it." He found a 1991 Rover Cooper, an early SPi model, in his local paper. Unfortunately things were not great when it came to the Mini's bodywork. "It had a good paint job but it hid a lot of patch work and filler. The previous owner was a body builder but I think he spent more time in the gym than he spent on the Mini. There were quite a few horrors like holes in the floor, oversills and everything that goes with it."

This is the point of the Mini's story where Martin delivered the Mini to Paul Preston's bodyshop to sort the patches, with a view to bringing it up to concours standard. They have since become good friends. "I dropped it off to sort the floors and it came back as good as this!" As with many Minis needing some TLC, the front end required attention but this Cooper needed much more, including rear quarters, heelboard, boot lid and driver's door.

In Martin's quest to have a Mini good enough for concours competitions, the front subframe and a replacement rear subframe were sent off for powder coating. Martin and Paul were not content with the results so Paul instead keyed the subframes and applied four coats of two-pack paint. The same goes for the radius arms.

One of the most notable mods carried out on this Mini is in the fuelling department. "I was going to keep it as an SPi but then I got talking to Paul, who suggested a few things, and mentioned a nice Weber carb he had in the garage." Martin knew that bolting a side-draught Weber 40 DCOE onto a Mini wasn't exactly straightforward but Paul had a plan and welded a box in the bulkhead to make room for the Weber. It has to be said that keeping exhaust emissions within MOT requirements using such a carb is tricky. Interestingly, UK petrol-engined vehicles used before 1 August 1992 are subject to

the 'Non-Cat' emissions test, even if fitted with a catalytic converter from the factory.

Martin has a history of building gearboxes, as he used to build truck gearboxes for a crust, but he gave the job of rebuilding the Cooper's box to Guess Works. "I did fancy doing it but it came down to getting supplies." The SPi head was sent to MED, who carried out the porting and chamber work. "A DSN Classics timing chain casing was fitted too, which is an incredible bit of kit. But I don't normally buy from them as, unless it's polished, it doesn't go on my car."

He did get his hands dirty with some engine-related jobs. He made the sensible choice to strip and rebuild the new oil pump. "I'm really glad I did, as I found half a tea-spoon of swarf in it." The engine has come together thanks to a variety of sources, with Paul's friend Derek, an ex-Lola mechanic, bolting everything together for the final engine assembly. Martin decided he wanted straight-cut drop-gears, more for the sound than anything else. "It had to sound like a Mini. You'd know a Moggie Minor was driving past, with your eyes shut. It should be the same with a Mini. It should whine. It's meant to give you more power too, not that I'm fighting for the last few bhp as I don't see the point."

The first rolling road session, a trip to A&B Garage in Wales, was somewhat eventful. "It shot the central front core plug across the workshop! We never found it and it fired water into Ade the operator's tool chest." Thankfully, a new one was found so the car could be driven home. It was then decided that Evans waterless coolant might be a good move. He says that the engine runs quite cold, maybe because of the alloy radiator. This is unusual for Evans coolant. "The temperature gauge never went above a quarter, even after getting stuck in traffic for three hours on the London to Brighton."

It's been on the rollers twice now but Martin is still keen to fettle the Weber further. "It pulls really strongly but with initial hesitation, splutter, then it goes. I've stuck with the original cam and rockers too, as they work well."

Eagle-eyed readers out there may have noticed, in the engine bay pictures, there is one rather important item missing. The wiper motor has been relocated behind the dashboard, even after Martin polished it and considered a stainless cover for it. It has resulted in de-cluttering the bulkhead and looks spot on. "Someone did »

OWNER PROFILE

## Martin Grewcock

**Occupation:** Classic Car and Motorcycle Salesman
**Worst Mini moment?** Not beating the 911 I tried to drag race
**Cars you would like to own:** Ferrari 458
**Dream job?** *Top Gear* presenter
**Are you obsessed with your Mini?** Oh yes!
**Does your Mini have a name?** The Money Pit

point out that, when it rains, it will be noisy," but it's clear that Martin doesn't intend to drive this Mini in the rain.

The current loom did require some work when removing the injection system, as mating it up with the dashboard meant amalgamating a replacement loom and the old loom. "The wiring loom is coming out too, as I don't want that under there." Obviously the engine and components still need electricity, but it will be supplied in a more stealthy fashion. "As well as the loom-less look there are so many other things I want to do to the engine bay. I've toyed with moving the coil, which doesn't appear to get hot." This is something he admits needs further investigation. An interesting feature of the 123 distributor is how it can be programmed. "I can link it to the tablet in my dash, and it comes up with the ignition curves, as there is a Windows application for it. I just have to connect a USB cable that attaches to the side."

Martin is blatantly a lover of a good buffing session, which includes shining up the alternator, but that didn't quite go to plan initially. "It took nine hours of polishing but, two days after I finished the car, the alternator light wouldn't go out! I sent the alternator away to be rebuilt, which wasn't cost effective, but I didn't want to polish another one! The Weber took me days to polish, as did the bell housing and transfer casing, and keeping on top of that when it's in the car is really hard. I'd like to say I have a lot of time on my hands but I don't."

There are other mods in the engine bay too. Originally this Mini would have had the direct-acting brake master cylinder and brake servo, mounted in the engine bay, but that has been removed and replaced with a single-line brake system fed by a single-line brake master cylinder. The later type pedal box had to be fitted with an early type brake pedal to make it all work.

This was always going to be a concours Mini and Martin was keen to only use genuine Rover Sports pack arches to cover the chunky 13-inch Superlites. "People were asking £500 for genuine arches and I found the aftermarket ones to be just horrible. We had three sets of aftermarket ones turn up at Paul's workshop. He refused to paint them because of the poor quality." Paul got lucky and sourced a genuine set from Mini Technique in Lancashire. "Getting the correct rubbers was a pain too." Martin sourced the rubber he was after from Phoenix Supplies. "I don't think it would look finished if I'd left it on 12s that didn't fit the arch and I didn't want it on Sports Pack 13s. Paul suggested that I put it on 10s," which was a no-go for »

Retaining the SPi's original Rover seats, Martin had a bespoke set of covers made to his own design.

Rockford Fosgate speakers have been used throughout the ICE install. These 6x9-inch component speakers sit under the rear seat.

A Samsung tablet mounted in the dashboard provides the entertainment but can also be used to re-programme the distributor.

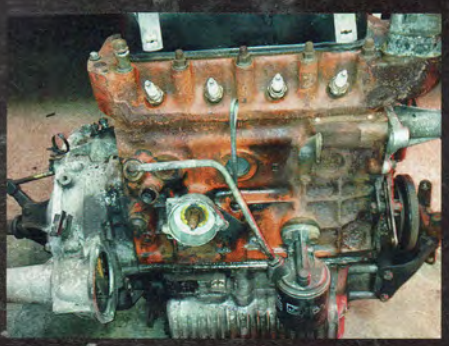
Genuine Rover Sports pack arches cover the 13-inch Superlight wheels.

"I sent the alternator away to be rebuilt, which wasn't cost effective, but I didn't want to polish another one!"

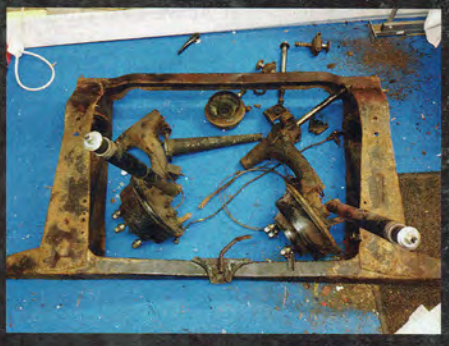
## The build

The bodyshell, stripped and mounted on Paul's spit.

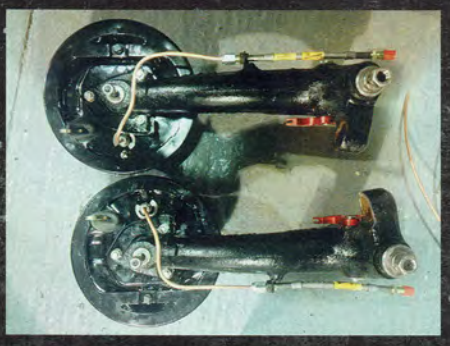
Doorstep and lower rear quarters needed replacing.



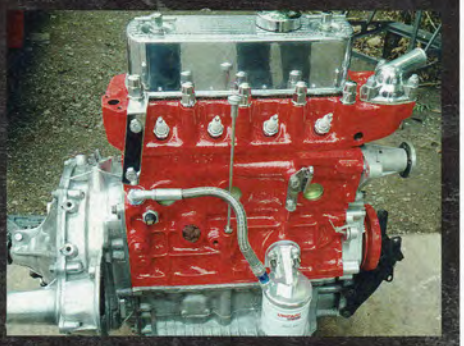
The SPi engine block and box ready for strip-down.



The rear subframe was replaced with a new one.



Built-up radius arms with refurbished brakes.



The rebuilt SPi engine, ready to drop in to the Mini.

"The Mini has never seen rain and lives in a heated and dehumidified garage."

The rear parcel shelf houses 6.5-inch components and this very cool embroidered Cooper badge.

The boot is decked out with white leatherette to match the interior.

Martin. "I know I can sit on the motorway at 70 without it screaming." We won't mention the drop gears at this point then!

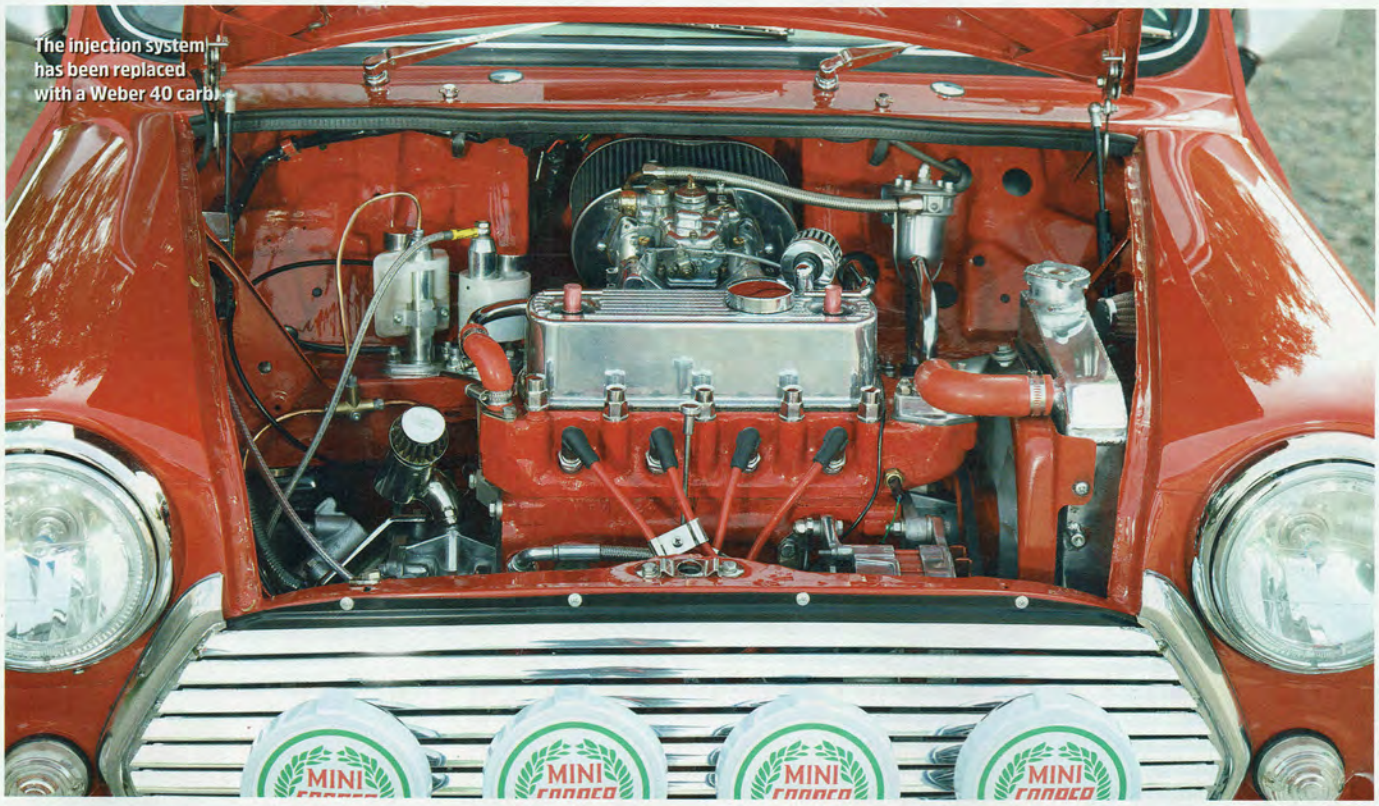
He is now very wary about where he sources components. "I picked up two bumpers at a show and they were an inch too short!" A stainless steel set was also binned. "There was no way I could fit them, as they were so dull. In the end I picked up a chrome pair from Julian from Min-its. They fit well and look good." He explains how difficult it is to stay on top of quality control when it comes to keeping parts looking good for competition: "The Mini has never seen rain, and it lives in a heated and dehumidified garage, but I had powder-coated shock mounts go rusty! There have been chrome items I've bought and never fitted because they've rusted beforehand."

Chatting to Martin it's obvious that a striking interior was high on the priority list. "I did a lot of research for the interior as a lot of people didn't want to make the bespoke interior I was after. I came across an eBay advert for VW interiors from Wrighton's Trim Shop. It turned out that Elaine from there used to work for Rover." She asked Martin to supply her with his design on paper and a picture of the seats so she could identify them. He spec'd out exactly what he wanted, including white leatherette with red stitching, and it went from there. Such seats covers are never going to be cheap but he was pleasantly surprised at the final price and, quite rightly, very impressed as Elaine delivered the covers and door cards in just four weeks. Wrighton's could have recovered the seats for Martin but it was a job he fancied doing himself. "I bought a new driver's seat sponge from Newton Commercial and spent the winter recovering them myself. Never re-cover seats in winter, though, as it's too cold," he adds with a laugh.

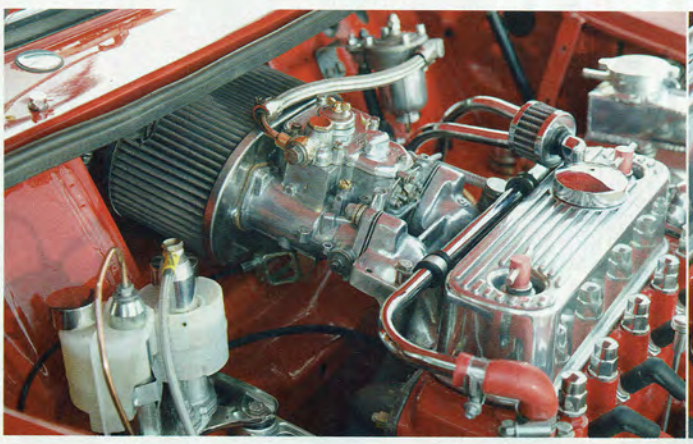
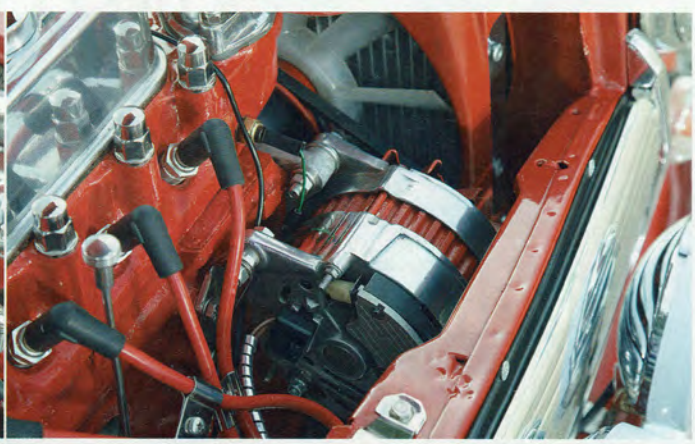
He also covered the dash rails and boot. "I struggled with the bottom dash as nobody would do it in the leatherette material. A friend of mine is an upholsterer, so I took it to him." He wasn't keen either, citing that it would take a lot of time and effort to fit, but Martin got a call a few days later to say it was done. "He hadn't covered it, he'd sprayed it!" And it's a theme that's been carried over to other interior items such as the heater, steering cowl and indicator switches, among others.

2015 saw the Mini being entered into two concours events. Even from the off he did well on the silverware front with a second in class at Mini in the Park at Santa Pod and first in class at the National Mini Show at Stanford Hall. As we go to press the Cooper is undergoing a revamp with plenty of work still to be completed before it hits the show scene in the summer. When you see it, be sure to take a close look at one of the most impressive modified Minis on the UK show circuit.

**Martin would like to thank:** Dave at Knight Engine Services (+44 (0)1327 340900, www.knightengineservices.co.uk); Paul Preston (+44 (0)7719 671555, www.paulprestonminis.co.uk); Elaine at Wrighton's Trim Shop, Redditch (+44 (0)1527 585010); Guess Works (+44 (0)800 0248454, www.guess-works.com).




TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

# Modified **1991 SPi Rover Mini Cooper**

**Engine:** 1275cc A-plus, overbored +0.020-inch (plateau-honed bores) to 1293cc . +0.020-inch pistons . 12G940 SPi cylinder head (MED gas-flowed, ported head, K-Line valve guides, 37mm inlet, 30mm exhaust) . OE Rover camshaft . OE rocker assembly . OE crank . RetroSport billet aluminium timing chain cover . RetroSport top engine steady . duplex steel timing chain . Weber 40 side-draught carb . polished alloy inlet manifold . K&N air filter . deep-impeller water pump . aluminium 2-core radiator . Facet 476087 silver-top fuel pump . white plastic mechanical fan . 123 Ignition programmable distributor . silicone HT leads . Malpassi alloy Filter King fuel filter . Maniflow Stage-2 LCB . Maniflow single-silencer straight twin-exit exhaust . Lucas coil . NGK spark plugs . Smiffy's bits items: transfer casing breather, cylinder head coolant take off, alternator bracket, HT lead clamp . Evans waterless coolant . 91bhp at flywheel . **Gearbox:** SPi four-speed, all-synchro, manual gearbox . late-type plastic reservoir clutch master cylinder . Verto clutch, flywheel . rod-shift . Mini Spares straight-cut 1:1 drop gears . central oil pick-up pipe . Mini Spares cross-pin diff . **Brakes:** 8.4-inch grooved discs . Mini Sport 4-pot billet alloy front calipers (fitted post-photoshoot) . EBC GreenStuff pads . Minifin-style rear brake drums . single-circuit hydraulic system . DOT5 race brake fluid . copper brake pipes . stainless steel-braided Goodridge brake hoses . billet aluminium handbrake quadrants . pedal box modified for single-circuit master cylinder . Lockheed single-circuit brake master cylinder . **Suspension:** Manual 2-bolt dry front subframe . solid front subframe mounts . replacement rear subframe . KYB dampers . OE-spec rubber cones . Hi-Lo trumpets . adjustable tie bars . **Wheels/Tyres:** 7x13 polished Superlite deep-dish alloys . Yokohama A539 175/50x13 radial tyres . **Interior:** Early Rover Mini SPi seats retrimmed in white leatherette . custom Newton Commercial red carpet . red seatbelts . OE gauges, modified with white faces . additional gauges: oil pressure, oil temperature, voltage . polished alloy steering wheel, red leather trim . Cooper 500 gearknob . chromed gear lever . brushed aluminium dashboard . aluminium door furniture . bonnet gas struts . leatherette-lined boot . relocated wiper motor behind dash . **ICE:** Samsung tablet mounted in dashboard . Parrot Entertainment and Bluetooth unit . Rockford Fosgate micro amp PBR300X4 (300W, 4-channel) . 2 6.5-inch Rockford Fosgate component speakers in rear parcel shelf . 2 6x9-inch Rockford Fosgate speakers under rear seat . **Exterior:** 1991 Rover Mini Cooper bodyshell . panels replaced: sills, A-panels, wings, front panel, half scuttle, rear valance, heelboard, driver's door, boot lid . Flame Red two-pack paint (COF). angel eye H4 headlights . Wipac spotlights . OE door mirrors painted silver . genuine Rover Sports Pack wheel arch extensions