



Steve Says The 2020 Mini JCWs Are Faster! But What Else Is There?

I love this current generation of MINIs for their balanced approach to performance, style and premium attitude. And the biggest Coopers also lend themselves to more versatility. Furthermore, this one takes the John Cooper Works approach to new heights.

This is the new JCW Countryman.

In 1961 British racing legend John Cooper, intrigued by the newly launched Mini, fitted the diminutive car with a more powerful engine and bigger brakes to create the rally champion known as the Mini Cooper.

So when you see a John Cooper Works MINI today, you know it represents the pinnacle of performance within the brand. With the exception of the Hardtop 4 Door and new Electric model, every MINI can be spec'd as a JCW. But the exciting news for the 2020 model year focuses on the big MINIs, the Clubman and Countryman. With a bigger turbo, new fuel injectors and reinforced engine components, power surges from 228- to 301 horsepower while its 331 lb-ft of torque is a nearly 30% improvement.

So suddenly, the largest JCW MINI goes from kind of fast to legitimately quick, lopping 1.5 seconds from its 0-to-60mph time, taking it down to 4.9 seconds. And yes, launch control is included. There's an updated 8-speed auto but for those of you looking for the 6-speed, sorry; the stick is dead. A differential lock aids in keeping the front tires adhered to the road while the standard all-wheel drive system has been enhanced to handle the additional power, sending available torque rearward in anticipation of slippage at the front.

There are 2-stage dampers for either a sporty or more relaxed chassis and new bracing for the front end tightens up the body while the sport brake system has been redesigned with bigger 4-piston, fixed-caliper discs at the rear. Race track derived cooling, a racier exhaust and new LED headlights round out the changes.

Inside, the deeply bolstered JCW sport seats put occupants on notice that shenanigans will likely ensue. It's an impressive leap forward for the highest performing Countryman and the design details convincingly convey the sporty attitude...I absolutely love this color combination of Light White and Chili Red. It's exactly how I would spec it.

Fire it up and choose your setup; the more relaxed Green and Mid modes combined with the hushed cabin present themselves as docile as any mainstream midsize car. Toggle up to Sport and the pipes get wider, the drivetrain and chassis become highly energized and now you're ready for MINI fun. And this is an engine happy to proclaim it's a turbo with the boost seemingly dumped on you all at once.

The summer-use 19" Pirelli Cinturato P7 run-flats come up a little short in handling and feel and torque-steer is present here in small doses when you really get into the gas pedal.

Having more power here is of course a welcome addition and to best utilize it switch into Sport mode and use the paddles - that's the Countryman's happy place for backroads like this where the turbo punches hardest and the exhaust is dialed up to 10. But the size and weight of this model dilutes the MINI's hallmark go-cart nature enough that it's not as much fun to drive as I had hoped. And the soft brake pedal and unpredictable stopping distances give you reason to pause.

No matter the suspension setting, you're going to feel the road but that's part of the MINI charm. And I like the heads-up display for allowing me to keep my eyes on the road but I wish it would show gear selection and RPMs in addition to speed. I certainly sense the brand of MINI fun here but at 3,800 pounds I surmise that the lighter Clubman with this engine, not to mention the upcoming 2-door GP, would be far more delightful.

The Iconic trim is the fully loaded Countryman and as such provides most the premium features you'd expect in a car of this purpose and price point including excellent tech integration, heads up display, double glass roof, firm sport seats, a dual mode exhaust and quiet cabin.

But as for blind zone alert, power seats or a heated steering wheel - they're not to be.

Starting at about \$42,000 this fully loaded Iconic trim with the Driver Assistance Package retails for \$50,100. As we know, there's always a bit of sticker shock with stocked MINIs but their highly customizable nature and uniqueness are a huge part of the charm that commands a premium. And the Countryman is very BMW-like with mostly easy to use and cool looking electronics, wireless CarPlay with a nifty center console charge pad and phone holder, ambient lighting, active cruise control, auto high beams and a natural speech navigation system that anyone could instantly use. As for versatility, I had 3 across back here for a family trip and the Countryman is definitely capable of that chore with plenty of legroom and the 18 cubic feet of cargo room is appropriately sized and expandable with underfloor storage and some other clever goodies. All told, it possesses a high quality look and feel that offers something different and I really like

that about MINI.

Despite the big power boost gas mileage is up to 26mpg in combined driving on premium with a 420 mile driving range.

A lightly updated Countryman has been announced for the 2021 model year, but until then this JCW is an enjoyable take on a souped-up MINI capable of off-road adventures and racetrack jaunts.

By [TestDriveNow](#) Auto Critic Steve Hammes for [SouthFloridaReporter.com](#), June 4, 2020

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