

Portland Observer Auto Review

News and reviews on new motor vehicles

2007 BMW Mini Cooper Convertible

Fun & Frugality

By KATHLEEN CARR

The Cooper Convertible offers the excellent handling and cute, retro style of the Cooper hatchback with the added fun and versatility of a one-touch soft-top roof. The Mini convertible is in a league of its own; excellent-handling with all the charm and economy of a regular Mini, plus the added fun of a high-quality soft-top that goes down at the touch of a button.

Though the hatchback Mini got a redesign for 2007, the convertible continues on largely unchanged for this year. Expect a redesigned convertible for the 2008 or 2009 model years. In the meantime, Mini has added the Sidewalk package, which adds a few thousand dollars to the base cost and features interior and exterior upgrades.

Our compliments on the genius design of this soft-top; being such

that the fabric can even fold back half-way (up to 16 inches), making a sunroof. Unlike most sunroofs, which are directly overhead, this one is slightly in front of you, so front-seat passengers actually can see the sky while their heads remain shaded. The half-top can be opened when the car is driving at speeds up to 75 mph and even features a heated rear window. In addition, the top can be lowered or raised from up to 49 feet away using the car's key fob. This has got to be the cleverest top ever.

The Cooper Convertible comes with a choice of two inline four-cylinder engines. The base model gets a 1.6-liter 115-horsepower engine, while the Cooper S gets a 168-horsepower supercharged engine. The 1.6-liter engine of the non-supercharged version provides brisk acceleration perfect for city driving, merging or passing on the highway; we found it be lively 0-to-60 mph in 9.8 seconds, while Mini reports 8.9 - it still feels zippy.

A five-speed manual transmission is standard for the base model, while the Cooper S gets a six-speed manual. Optional for the base model is a continuously variable automatic



Specifications: 1.6-Liter, 16-Valve, inline 4-Cylinder Engine; 5-Speed manual transmission; 26-City 35-Highway MPG; \$ 27,400. MSRP

transmission (CVT) and optional for the S is a six-speed automatic. We preferred the standard manual; gear changes are a delight thanks to light, precise throws teamed with a smooth, progressive clutch.

When it comes to handling, most feel that the 2007 Mini Cooper Convertible is a star thanks to its impressively firm suspension and sharp steering. Steering is tight in

the Mini, and the handling contributes a large part of this car's fun factor." That excellent handling is achieved through the convertible's retuned suspension. "It's no surprise that the drop-top versions handle just the same as their hard-top brethren, due to underbody reinforcements and a rear crossbar with integrated roll-over headrests. The Mini's acclaimed go kart cor-

nering capability is left intact.

The Cooper convertible's quirky dashboard and controls are a bit confusing; the switches are in all kinds of weird spots. Minis are also known for being endlessly customizable with interior color and trim combinations. New for 2007 is a special Sidewalk package that adds several special touches to the interior. Features include English

Malt Brown leather upholstery and gearshift, two-tone sport leather multifunction steering wheel with cruise control, chrome line interior, a center armrest, automatic air conditioning, sport seats and a Harmon/Kardon HiFi sound system. The Sidewalk package also adds subtle exterior features.

Despite its compact size, the Mini convertible is probably the safest car in the compact class. To protect passengers in a crash, the Mini Cooper Convertible provides four front and side air bags. It also comes with an accident sensor, which automatically unlocks doors and turns on interior and hazard lights upon impact. If the air bags have been deployed, the car will cut off the fuel pump to reduce the risk of fire.

The Mini convertible surprises and delights with its serious motor-ing capabilities. Its chassis is extremely rigid for a topless car, so Drop the top and enjoy the ride

Fun and frugality may never have combined so purely and completely as in the Mini Cooper convertible. And from what we've seen of the second-generation version, which is right around the corner, none of that is likely to change.

SPORTS



Oregon receiver Jaison Williams celebrates his touchdown during the first half of their college football game against Arizona State in Eugene, Saturday, Nov. 3. (AP photo)

Ducks Move to No. 3

Have shot at national championship

(AP) -- Picked to finish in the middle of the Pac-10, Oregon has thrust itself into the heart of national title race. Dennis Dixon threw four touchdown passes and the fourth-ranked Ducks defeated No. 6 Arizona State 35-23 on Saturday, their second consecutive victory over a Top 10 team.

Oregon moved to third place in the Bowl Championship Series standings released Sunday. Louisiana State University took advantage of Boston College's first loss of the season, moving to second with unbeaten Kansas looming in fourth.

Undefeated Ohio State (10-0) is still in first, and could lock up a second straight appearance in the BCS national championship game on Jan. 7 with victories against Illinois and Michigan in its last two games.

LSU (8-1) has at least three games left and probably four with the Southeastern Conference title game on Dec. 1. Winning out could get the Tigers a spot in the title

game at the Superdome in New Orleans.

That's no lock. Oregon (8-1) and Kansas (9-0) are close enough to at least have a shot at passing the Tigers, even if LSU doesn't drop a game.

The BCS could be heading for a repeat of last season, when Ohio State locked up the top spot the week before Thanksgiving and several teams jostled for the other spot over the next two weeks.

It came down to Florida and Michigan and the Gators got the votes they needed to pass the Wolverines in the final BCS standings. The outcome didn't sit well with Michigan and showed the glaring flaws in the Bowl Championship Series.

The system hasn't changed and the problem of trying to choose between several worthy contenders to play in the title game could come up again in the coming weeks.

LSU has a BCS average of .941. The Tigers are second in both the Harris and coaches' poll, which makes

up two-third of a BCS average, and are No. 2 in the computer ratings.

Oregon's BCS average is .918 and Kansas is at .843. The surprising Jayhawks still have a big game against sixth-place Missouri left on the schedule and a possible Big 12 championship game. Winning both would give Kansas' numbers a substantial boost.

Oklahoma's average is .839. Missouri, West Virginia, Boston College, Arizona State and Georgia round out the top 10.

In the AP Top 25, the first five teams are Ohio State, LSU, Oregon, Oklahoma and Kansas.

LSU, which has been living on the edge for the past month, won another close game Saturday. The Tigers came from behind to beat Alabama 41-34.

Kansas routed Nebraska 76-39 and Oklahoma pounded Texas A&M 42-14.

If all these teams keep winning, how impressively they go about their business could determine which gets a shot at the title.

Blazers Home Opener Thursday

First of four-game stand

The Portland Trail Blazers have announced that only standing room and single seats remain for opening night vs. New Orleans on Thursday, Nov. 7 at 7:30 p.m. at the Rose Garden.

The first 15,000 fans entering the Rose Garden will receive a commemorative cap, courtesy of Wells Fargo. The lights on the Morrison Bridge will shine red and white to support the start of the season,



Larry Miller

thanks to Multnomah County and the Willamette Light Brigade.

"The Rose Garden is now once again the place to be and fans can expect an enhanced game experience, both on opening night and every other

game this season," said Trail Blazers president Larry Miller. "We have a young and exciting team and we have made significant upgrades to the building, including a new high-definition scoreboard, a new state-of-the-art sound system and a new restaurant, Pyramid Taproom

at Schonely's Place, named after our legendary broadcaster."

Tickets are moving fast for the remainder of the opening week.

The games include Friday, Nov. 9 vs. Memphis, when the first 10,000 fans receive a free Greg Oden Bobblehead courtesy of Wells Fargo; Saturday, Nov. 10 vs. Dallas, which includes a special halftime ceremony honoring soldiers who have returned from duty in the Middle East; and Tuesday, Nov. 13 vs. Detroit, when the team honors its rich heritage with a special ceremony celebrating the 1990 and 1992 Western Conference Champion teams.

Veterans of All Wars Parade and Planning Committee

Invite You To:

The 33rd Annual Veterans' Day Parade & Program

When: Sunday November 11th, 9:45 A.M.

Where: Hollywood District between NE 40th and 48th Ave. and Sandy Blvd.

The parade includes veterans groups, community groups, representatives from all military service organizations and local high school bands. The parade will conclude with a ceremony at Ross Hollywood Chapel Veterans Memorial Flag Pole. War memorabilia available for viewing. Covered seating for seniors and disabled will be available at the ceremony location.



Sponsored By:

Ross Hollywood Chapel and The Hollywood Boosters Association

*Please donate this holiday season to the "Toys For the Deployed" at the parade & at Ross Holiday Chapel, 4733 NE Thompson, Portland, Oregon 97213
Please drop off your unwrapped toys by December 15, 2007.

For more Information Contact: Lynn at 503-281-1800.

Local Weightlifter Qualifies for Greece

A northeast Portland weightlifter is on the fast track to reaching the top of his sport.

After sweeping past the competition April 28 in his first championship at the Oregon State Natural competition, Julius "The Antidote" Thomas won a gold medal Sept. 22 at the USA All

Natural in Los Angeles.

He now qualifies to compete internationally and is trying to secure sponsors in order for him to represent the U.S. team in Greece.

To make a contribution or for more information, call Thomas' manager at 503-270-1620.



Julius "The Antidote" Thomas

PSU Home Finale Saturday

This Saturday afternoon a pair of teams headed in the wrong direction will meet at

PGE Park at 1:30 p.m. when the Portland State University host the Montana State Bobcats in the final home game of the season for the Vikings.

PSU has lost four straight games heading into this week, the longest losing streak in four

seasons. The Vikings are 2-7 overall and 2-4 in the Big Sky Conference. Montana State, which was in the top 20 just two weeks ago, comes off a bad road loss at Northern Colorado and a home loss to Northern Arizona.