

# Portland Observer Auto Review

News and reviews on new motor vehicles

## 2008 BMW Mini Cooper

### The Uniquely Individual Mini

BY KATHLEEN CARR

Engineered by BMW, the new 2008 Mini Cooper is one of the most interesting looking cars on the road today. This is the reason Mini Cooper dealers have been kept hopping busy filling orders for this hot little sport sedan. The brainchild of auto designer Frank Stephenson, the Mini offers performance and style in a compact package that's a natural alternative to the giant, gas-guzzling SUVs of today.

The new 2008 Mini Cooper comes in two models — the barebones Cooper (our test model), and the more sophisticated Cooper S.

For a tiny car, the Mini Cooper packs quite a punch. The Mini hatchback and convertible come with completely different powertrains. The Cooper hatchback comes with a newly designed 1.6-liter four-cylinder that produces 118 horsepower and 114 pound-feet of torque.

The Cooper S hatchback features a turbocharged version of the



Specifications: 1.6-Liter 16-Valve 118-hp @ 114 lb-ft. torque 4-Cylinder engine; 6-Speed manual Getrag transmission; 28-City 37-Highway MPG; \$21,450. MSRP

same engine that reduces 172 hp and 177 lb-ft of torque. Both come standard with a six-speed manual, and a six-speed automatic with manual shift control is optional. Finally, of course, there's the overall 2008 Mini Cooper performance — with a top speed of 124 mph, the car can go from zero to sixty in less than nine seconds. Truly unbelievable!

Still, everything about the 2008 Mini Cooper comes back to looks. On the outside, the new models

offer add-on spats, or fenders, that differ from the color of the car itself, creating a contrast that accentuates the vehicle's compact size.

It takes an expert to pick out the differences between the 2008 MINI Cooper and the first-generation car. The headlamps blend into the body better, the rear side glass panels are a little more tapered, and the shoulders on the rear fenders are slightly more pronounced. Good thing: the MINI's iconic shape didn't need a

complete reinvention. Inside the Cooper has more obvious changes, including a slimmer center stack of controls, a much bigger speedometer that now contains audio controls, and a Start button.

The 2008 MINI Cooper's suspension teams MacPherson struts in front with a central-arm rear axle, an unusual design for small front-wheel-drive cars. Even on the sport-tuned suspension with 17-inch wheels, there's a noticeable im-

provement in ride response. The new electric power steering is pretty good as far as these systems go, but there's an artificial feel that's contrary to everything else about the MINI.

The cars also offer a sleek look that includes rear support pillars behind the exterior glass, a look that's lost with the more conventional C-pillar. Inside, this alternative look continues with dashboard toggle switches, a typical feature of classic British cars, and spherical air vents. Racing gloves and silk scarf are two Mini accessories that don't come standard.

Surprisingly, for a car as small as this one, the 2008 Mini Cooper toy-sized car offers a number of active and passive safety features. Active features include four-wheel antilock brakes, electro-hydraulic power-assisted steering, and cornering brake control. Passive features include a crash sensor system, advanced crumple zones, and six standard airbags. All told, the Mini has earned a four-star safety rating from the National Highway Transportation and Safety Administration, and a "Best Pick" designation from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Long rides will be much more comfortable in the 2008 MINI Cooper, thanks to better seats. Three levers let drivers and pas-

sengers maneuver their seats into optimal positions, as does the telescoping steering wheel. The sculpted seatbacks give rear-seaters marginally more room for knees, even though interior dimensions haven't changed. The backseat remains a place for occasional riders in a good mood. Even without passengers, rear headrests cut into straight-back visibility.

The base Cooper hatchback comes standard with 15-inch alloy wheels, a selectable Sport setting for steering and accelerator response, full power accessories with auto up/down windows, air-conditioning, leatherette premium vinyl upholstery, multicolor mood lighting, a tilt-telescoping leather-wrapped steering wheel, a trip computer and a six-speaker stereo with CD player and auxiliary audio jack.

The 2008 MINI Cooper is one of the most popular cars on the market, in terms of buyers competing for each one. Discounts are unheard of and resale values are high!

Mini is one of the few brands that encourages its customers to customize and special order their cars. Take the time to wade through the options and make a MINI that's uniquely your own. But don't let its carefree attitude and cute looks fool you. It's one extreme machine that is like nothing else out there.

## EL OBSERVADOR

# Coca Production Expands

### U.S. fights \$5 billion war on drugs

(AP)—Colombia's coca crop—the basis for cocaine—grew by 27 percent last year, the United Nations reported last week, calling the increase "a surprise and a shock" given major U.S.-funded eradication efforts.

Eradication of the crop in Colombia, the world's No. 1 cocaine-producing nation, has been the cornerstone of a multibillion-dollar U.S. aid package.

Coca cultivation was also up 4 percent in Peru and 5 percent in Bolivia, the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime reported in its annual survey.

It estimated cocaine production in the Andean region was stable, however, at about 994 metric tons compared to 984 metric tons in 2006.

Colombian cocaine production failed to keep pace with coca planting because police pressure forced an interruption in the growing cycle, Gen. Oscar Naranjo, chief of Colombia's police, told reporters.

"These young crops, the new ones, are less productive," Naranjo told a press conference in Bogota.

He said that eradication programs also are pushing coca farmers to



A worker uproots coca shrubs during a manual eradication campaign of coca fields in Taraza, in the northwestern Colombia's state of Antioquia. Guarded by counter narcotics police officers and the army, more than 200 peasants are eradicating coca crops in the region. (AP Photo)

more remote areas where it is harder to obtain the chemicals needed to make cocaine.

He noted, however, that almost half of Colombia's coca comes from

just 10 of the country's 195 municipalities. "Just like in Afghanistan, where most opium is grown in provinces with a heavy Taliban presence, in Colombia most coca is grown in areas controlled by insurgents."

In all, 99,000 hectares, or 382 square miles, of coca cultivation were found in Colombia last year, up from 78,000 hectares in 2006, the U.N. said. It estimated total cultivation last year in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia—the world's three principal sources of coca — at 181,600 hectares, or 701 square miles.

Last year, Colombia's drug police sprayed herbicide on 160,000 hectares of coca and manually eradicated another 50,000 hectares.

Washington has spent more than \$5 billion in Colombia over the past seven years to combat both a long-running insurgency and the world's largest cocaine industry, a business that helps fund a five-decade armed conflict.

Some Democrats in the U.S. Congress are criticizing the heavy military focus of U.S. aid to Colombia.

## Mexico Tackles Rising Food Prices

(AP)— Food manufacturers have promised Mexico's government to freeze prices on more than 150 food products to help families cope with rising costs.

President Felipe Calderon announced last week that prices for goods such as cooking oil, flour, canned tuna, fruit juices, coffee, ketchup and canned tomatoes will remain fixed until Dec. 31.

"This is a measure that will positively and directly benefit the finances of millions of Mexicans," said

Calderon, flanked by representatives of Mexico's business chambers. "This reflects the commitment of Mexican businessmen to the country and to price stability."



Felipe Calderon

The Mexican leader has blamed high food costs on rising global energy prices, soaring food demand in China and India and the use of corn for ethanol production.

Calderon had eliminated import barriers on wheat, corn and rice in May, won an agree-

ment from rice farmers to sell their crop at 10 percent below international market prices and last year imposed price caps on tortillas, Mexico's staple food.

He also announced small monthly cash subsidies to 26 million poor Mexicans, about a quarter of the population. The cash payments of about 120 pesos (\$11.6) a month are expected to cost about \$433 million.

Mexico's central bank said annual inflation rose to 4.95 percent in May, the fastest pace in more than three years, led by the swelling costs of food oils, rice, wheat products and corn tortillas.

## Anti-Immigrant Measure Challenged

A broad coalition has formed to educate voters of the consequences Initiative Petition 19 would have on Oregon's children and economy.

The unfunded mandate termed "English Language Instruction" would prohibit teaching a public-school student in a language other than English for more than two years. This November, Oregonians will have the choice to reject

or pass a law which will take control away from local school boards, families and educators.

"Many of these children suffer from economic hardship and some have spent years in refugee camps with no formal schooling before coming to Oregon," said Kayse Jama of the Center for Intercultural Organizing.

Similar measures passed in other states have been shown to

hinder the ability of children to learn English. In California, a recent study revealed that, six years after an anti-bilingual education measure's passage, just one-quarter of Hispanic pupils could expect to be reclassified as fluent in English.

Last year, there were 62,084 students enrolled in English language development programs in Oregon school districts.

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