



Small is beautiful: green Cooper retains little of its factory metal but even lamp apertures have been spot-welded, as they would have been at the factory

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The youngest Issigonis Minis are now 16 years old, and even those are starting to need restoration – and sometimes not for the first time.

Luckily, a small band of enthusiasts revives them in a workshop just a few miles from Plant Oxford where the young pretender has been built since 2000. Daniel Budd started racing Minis on ovals at the age of 10, and constantly fertilising them inevitably meant that he was asked to work on cars for others. Then, of course, premises were needed and, well... here we are.

Restoration is a big part of the operation. And, thanks partly to the skills of Les Carter, who started on the line at Cowley in '64, they don't just chop out panels and sling on new ones here. If rear quarters are

required, which they usually are, only a section of metal is removed at first. This keeps the shell in shape while the sills are completed and, if needed (often), inner wheelarches and boot floors are added. What is surprising is how much worse the later cars rot, but Carter, a realist, points out: "All Minis are rusty. And the build quality was very variable."

Heritage panels are used throughout, which can add £2,500-6,000 per job before work begins. Pressings for older cars aren't available, though, so Carter has to adapt or cross-pollinate them, stitching the shells back together with a spot-welder, as per factory. He's proud of the long-reach welder he rescued from his previous life as a panel-beater, which means that he can get



Virtually all shells need new hind quarters

into areas where others can't. Using weld-through zinc primer should also give better protection.

If the customer wants, they'll fit shiny bits, and engines are built on site, though machining is farmed out – as is rolling-road tuning, to The Pitstop at Carterton.

RMC's unique set-up means that there can be several restorations on



Bill Hunter fits water pump on van engine



Mini 30 will be finished off by its owner

the go at any one time. It operates a pay-as-you-go scheme, whereby work can be scheduled and cars rotated according to funds: "We've got 10 or 11 cars on the board, and I need to tell the owners of numbers two and three that their vehicles are next." Luckily Minis are small, and each runs on its own dolly to ease moving them around. Collection is free within 100 miles and so is storage for the duration of the rebuild.

The firm is flexible about how much of the work it does: "We've currently got four cars in paint. Two will be finished by their owners, and we'll do the others." The Mini 30 had all of the major works done at RMC, but was shortly due to go home for completion: "That way, when the owner goes to a show, they can say they've done some of it."

Above the 30 was a 1-litre drum-braked car with no upgrades, "but it might end up with discs...", showing the level of commitment of owners wanting to preserve even the 'lesser' cars. As Budd says: "You don't just buy a Mini, you adopt it into your family. We've got about a 12-month waiting list for rebuilds."

Paul Hardiman