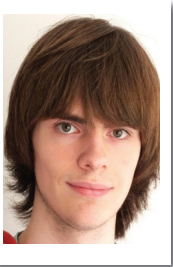


Review of the Mini Countryman



By Fraser Lucas

LOOKS

An interesting detail is how despite the Countryman growing in size (being longer, wider and taller), its features seem smaller and delicate. Its front lamps have gotten

less googly and more squarish, and the bodywork is less cluttered. In a bright white, it almost looks more like the Mini you drive on the surface of the moon with the design advancement. While it can be endlessly joked (again) how the largest Mini has had yet another growth spurt, this is easily the most visually unique Countryman so far.

HANDLING AND PERFORMANCE

With Mini, a big car doesn't mean there is no nippiness at hand. For its third iteration, the Countryman proves this fact once again. For something of its size, there's almost a shock to how well it drives around town. Even for something intended as sporty, its ride doesn't let it down. Engines available are a 1.5 petrol with 168 BHP, a 2.0-litre petrol with 217 BHP and a 296 BHP JCW version. Whichever one is picked though, guarantees the Countryman has a good bit of grunt to throw around. That said, the JCW packs a good wallop, though this is traded for a harsher suspension set-up.

PRACTICALITY

It's very familiar to the last car when you're inside, though that's hardly a detractor. The funky shapes and slick finish will probably never go out of style by this point. The big, round, central speedo on the original Countryman has now evolved into a massive infotainment screen. It's a showy bit of tech, lending more to that sci-fi feel, though it's very busy. One big positive (literally speaking) is that a larger Countryman means a more spacious cabin. Space has increased just about everywhere, so while it's a big Mini, it's a Mini you'll never feel cramped inside.

COST

Prices start at £29,350 for the 1.5 which goes up to £33,050. The 2.0 litre Cooper S is priced from £34,750 to £38,860, while the JCW can be had for £40,425. While not the cheapest, it still undercuts a fair slice of the competition as well as being bundled with a large equipment list and sluggish depreciation.

VERDICT

Outwardly, the Countryman could be seen as a bit of a fashion item, something that builds its success on trends and form over function. However, there is substance beneath all the character. It's well balanced in almost every field and has some extra tight handling thrown in to boot. The Mini name may seem more ironic now, but that doesn't get in the way of it being a good car.