

Clever touches *A different kind of drive, as intended* • by Joe Sage

The MINI Paceman we received for review in early 2014 was actually a 2013 model. However, the 2014 model specs out as being the same, other than a \$100 bump in its base price, though we haven't received detailed pricing for options (2013 sticker pricing shown at right). Meanwhile, the basic MINI Hardtop has had a new model already revealed (as far back as the LA Auto Show in November)—longer and wider and thus once again a little less “mini,” so we anticipate the Paceman heading down that same path. Their model years, calendar years and changes from model to model obviously flex a bit.

MINI does like to do simple, fun variants for the auto shows, which is not unusual except that they're generally well received, and whereas many such concepts ignore any clamoring for actual production, MINI has a tendency to go ahead and do so. Hence the Paceman. It may seem to serve no purpose beyond style, but it's actually one of our favorites. We like the lean and active stance of the original Hardtop, and we like the utility and capability of the Countryman, especially when in all-wheel-drive ALL4 trim. At first glance, the Paceman may seem more like the Hardtop, but it actually shares more with the Countryman, just with less apparent volume.

Most significantly, it is available with ALL4—there are Cooper, Cooper S, Cooper S ALL4 and John Cooper Works ALL4 variants. Most surprisingly, it turns out not to be all that small—we gave it a pretty good workout, as far as toting gear around town or luggage to the airport, though we didn't off-road it.

But we *did* off-road it last year, when we attended a multi-vehicle event in the North Cascades of Washington, called Mudfest. True to its name, that comparo put the Paceman on the same steep, hairpin, mud-soaked course as competitive vehicles of obvious SUV nature. It amazed us—and might have won its category except for one thing you can see at right: its price. MINI starts out affordably enough, but once you load on the options (and this list is not all that frivolous), it pushes 40 grand here. And this is before adding ALL4—which we would definitely want—or John Cooper Works ALL4, which would also be compelling.

Besides its utility, we'd like ALL4 in order to ward off some very torquey behavior experienced in this front-drive version, and we'd like the JCW treatment because we found it a little shorter on pep than anticipated.

That model starts \$8700 higher than this one, though, so if it needed the same options, to live a fulfilling life, you'd be nudging it up toward a highly inappropriate \$50 grand. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE1.6L 16v 4-cylinder turbo
 POWER181 hp, 177 lb-ft torque
 TRANSMISSIONSteptronic 6-spd auto
 DRIVETRAINfront-wheel drive
 MPG.....25/32/28 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE (2013)\$26,800

INCL: Run-flat tiresincl
 Center armrest.....incl

OPTIONS: Brilliant Copper paint500
 HotCross Carbon Blk/Carbon Blk.....1000
 Steptronic automatic1250
 19" Y-spoke silver alloy wheels1750
 Keyless entry500
 Rear park distance control500
 Xenon headlights500
 Satellite radio w/ 1 year subscrip.....250
 Harman/kardon premium audio750
 White turn signal lenses100

DESTINATION CHARGE:.....700

COLD WEATHER PACKAGE: power fold heated mirrors w/washer, heated seats750

MINI CONNECTED W/ NAV PACK: voice command, bluetooth-USB-iPod, smartphone integration, real time traffic, nav1500

PREMIUM PACKAGE 2: dual panel panoramic sunroof, auto climate1250

TOTAL\$38,100



LOGBOOK NOTES

The rear liftgate delivers good size, easy access, and is easy to just yank open and slam shut. We hope they never change to slow pushbutton pneumatics or electrics.

Side mirrors fall below the beltline, eclipsing a significant portion of the right side view.

On an airport run, we stashed a camera bag and briefcase below its retractable security cover, then wondered how we'd get a carry-on roller bag in there. Turns out it went in lengthwise, too, with plenty of room to spare.

The MINI Paceman started life as an auto show style drill, but ultimately is a nice, useful little package full of clever touches.

