

# family fix

The responsibilities of family life needn't spell an end to your classic Mini adventures; just ask Slovenian Mini fan Gregor Obronek...



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**F**or a whole host of Mini enthusiasts, there comes a time when a carefree singledom gives over to the responsibilities of family life. Forget tear-arsing around in your noisy slammed Mini with its hugely impractical bucket seats; you're now set for a lifetime of mundane people carrier ownership, where your once-beloved Mini stands neglected or, even worse, sold on.

But it doesn't always have to be this way, as Slovenian Mini addict Gregor Obronek proves. You may well be familiar with the name, as Gregor has appeared in *Mini Magazine* several times. As well as helping us out with various European jaunts, he was also a driving force in our recent feature on IMV Mini production in former Yugoslavia. In fact, Gregor was born just as the production line of Austin 1300 and partly assembled Mk3 Minis was being shut down in his native town of Novo Mesto, and went to primary school just across the road. Now married with a seven-year-old son, he's still a regular at events all over Europe thanks in no small part to his 'family' Mini – a 1966 Mk1 Morris Traveller.

## THE MINI VIRUS

Having been born so close to the home of Yugoslavian Minis, it's no surprise that Gregor soon became a real fan. "The BMC virus was in the air at the time of my birth," he says. "I knew all the Minis in my town and collected whatever I could find related to Minis. At the end of primary school my father promised to buy one, but he never actually fulfilled that desire."

Gregor's fondness for the Mini continued to develop. As soon as he began to pick up his first wage packets, he set about a nut and bolt restoration on his very first Mini, an early-'80s example in Primula Yellow. It won a prize that same year, and during the first years of ownership, covered a whopping 50,000km per year. After a while the standard 998cc engine made way for a 1275 motor, before being replaced by an MG Metro Turbo unit. It was the first conversion of its kind in Slovenia, and without the internet resources of today, Gregor was on his own when it came to making it all work. It must have been a pretty good effort, for in 1999 he made the long trip over to Silverstone for Mini 40 without a hitch.

A few years later, another Mini was purchased. This was a 1987 model, but given a retro makeover to make it look like an early Mk3 and fitted with a 1275cc engine from an Austin 1300. Gregor then gave it as a wedding present to his wife Jolanda, who he married in 2002. Naturally, she's also become a real fan of Minis and classic cars in general. "At that time I'd never thought there would be a day that I'd have even more Minis," says Gregor, "but then our son Svit was born and I needed a



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bigger Mini to attend meetings. At that time I was building a house too, so my budget was limited." With this in mind, Gregor began looking at Clubman Estates, reasoning that a slab-fronter would be the cheapest solution. However, buying a decent Mini in Eastern Europe is no easy task. There were just two Estates in the whole of Slovenia in total, never mind for sale, so Gregor switched his focus to neighbouring Italy.

## BELLISSIMO

Italian Minis are often well preserved thanks to the milder climate in most parts, but tracking down a suitable example proved difficult. Finally, after a year of searching he found an ad for something suitable – not a Clubman Estate, but a

Cowley-built 1966 Traveller. These are especially rare in Italy, as they were only sold there before the Innocenti Mini T was launched to cater for the domestic market. "The price was fair, but the photos were awful," recalls Gregor. "I immediately called the seller, but he could only speak Italian. Luckily, at that time my boss was fluent in Italian, so he called up and said I would come and see the car within two days. But the seller said not to come because there were two buyers coming already the next day in the afternoon."

The vendor had agreed to sell the Mini to the first buyer, and as Gregor didn't want to miss a unique chance, he was determined to get there ahead of anyone else. That night he received a few more close-up photos of the

car, which showed off its impressive condition. "That was it," he says. "I could not sleep, so I got up and left Slovenia at 2am so I could be the first one in front of the seller's door near Venice."

The Traveller was being sold by a Fiat dealer, and rather unusually was displayed in the showroom. Gregor caught a brief glimpse of it through the window, and quickly made his mind up. "I didn't even check the Mini, I just went directly to the seller and gave him an envelope full of money without any negotiation," says Gregor. He was shocked, and insisted I inspect it, but I just said 'there is no need, I will buy it as it is'."

Despite his recklessness, Gregor's purchase proved to be shrewd one. "It was

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Living the dream: Gregor's Traveller takes centre stage in his incredible workshop, which also houses his retro '87 saloon, his '65 Riley Elf and his beloved yellow Mini turbo.

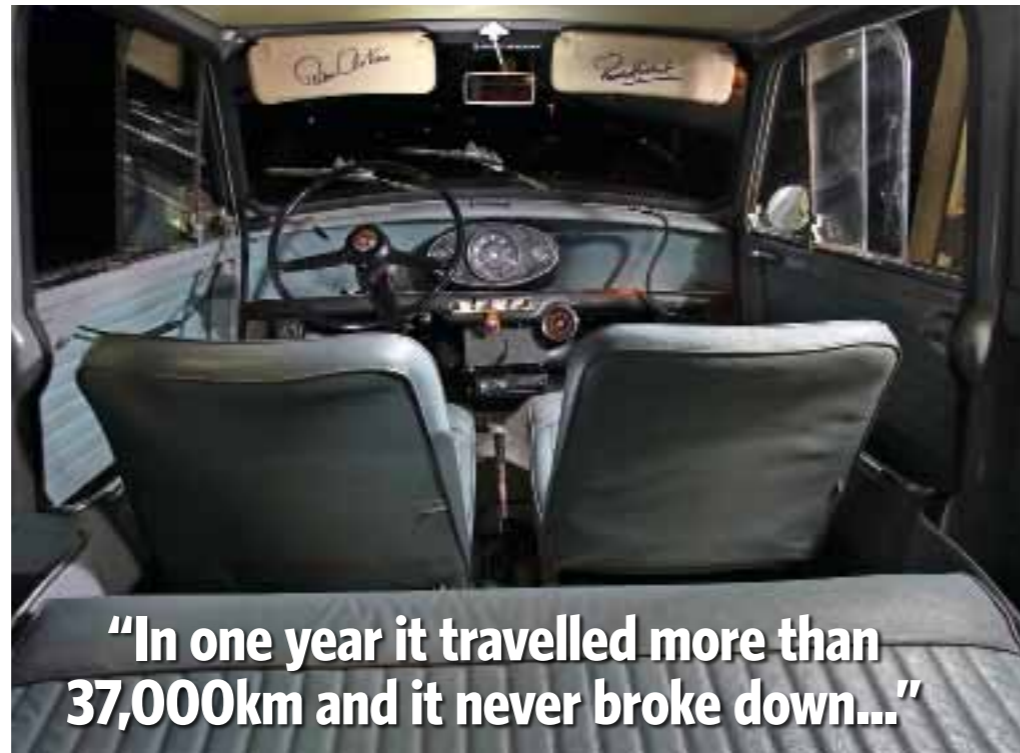


Family companion: Gregor, Jolanda and Svita have been to the UK and all over Europe in their beloved Traveller, even using it as their luxury accommodation!



Gregor's self-built workshop is a real Aladdin's Cave - a mix of old, new and new old stock parts!

Smiths vacuum gauge is just one of the several neat period additions Gregor has fitted inside.



**"In one year it travelled more than 37,000km and it never broke down..."**



last rebuilt in 1981, and since then it had covered only 6km from the workshop where it was restored to the showroom. After inspection, it was found that the shell had never been welded, and the rear subframe was still original. In fact, only the passenger door and the left-hand rear door weren't original BMC items, having been replaced with Innocenti Mini T items due to an accident. A few other parts were taken

from an Innocenti too, with the headlamps and indicators changed for Carello items. Sadly, the driving experience was not so positive. "After test driving it at home, I found the brakes were seized, the engine was overheating and the front wheel bearings were at the end of their lives," says Gregor. However, it soon emerged from his workshop with a clean bill of health, and was back on the road for the first time in

over 25 years. "Since then the Traveller has been used to attend Mini meetings all across Europe," says Gregor. "In one year it travelled more than 37,000km and it never broke down! It has been to Mini meetings in the UK, Italy, Serbia, Hungary and the Czech republic, as well as crossing Slovakia, Croatia, Bosnia, France, Belgium and Holland. In Germany people asked me if it was a Trabant!"



Traveller-related brochures and paraphernalia, plus a copy of the very first Mini Magazine!



'Mini Parking Only' reads the sign. Who needs anything else when you've got a Mini as versatile as this one?



The original 850 engine has made way for a 1275cc A-plus unit, but the traditional appearance has been retained.



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Extra numberplate light at the rear is due to a replacement door from an Innocenti Mini T, but it's staying that way!

## “The Travy has a story and it would be a shame to try to make it a show car...”




### GRAND TOURER

The biggest journey of all was a three-week holiday to England for the IMM at Longbridge in 2009, a decade after Gregor's first trip to England in his Mini turbo. But before setting off, he decided to modify the Traveller to cope with such long-distance driving. “It was a kind of crime, but the standard 850 engine was changed for a Metro 1275cc unit with 2.9 final drive and a few tweaks, but retaining the three-synchro magic wand gearbox,” he explains. Everything else was kept original, save for a Manifold exhaust, wider steel wheels from an early Innocenti and, later, a seven-inch disc conversion. It didn't miss a beat in three weeks, and amazingly doubled up as a hotel for Gregor and his family as they travelled around Britain's picturesque sights.

Since the trip to England, the Obronek fleet has swelled to include a Riley Elf, a Cooper 970 S project and a Triumph Spitfire, plus countless other Minis that Gregor has

transformed for fellow Slovenian Mini fans. However, the Traveller is definitely the special one. “It gives us great joy, and it is our favourite car in the workshop,” he says. “It's almost 50 and I do not try to hide patina. My plans were to restore it to its former glory, but later on I changed my mind. The Travy has a story and it would be a shame to hide it and try to make it a show car, so I've left it as it is, with some of the wrong but period-added parts. There are only two Mk1 travellers in Slovenia now, so that's why it's such an eye-catcher. A lot of people on the streets wonder what kind of Mini it is – 99 per cent of them did not know that there was estate version, too.”

Over the coming months, the Traveller will be prepared for another long journey to the UK for the IMM, plus a host of other meets across Europe. No doubt the car will attract plenty of admirers at the Kent showground, but Gregor is adamant that he will never sell it, or any of his projects for that matter. Instead, the Obronek family and their much-loved Traveller will continue to live together in harmony, no matter how many miles they rack up. 

### THANKS TO:

Gregor would like to thank: “My wife and son, my parents and all my Mini friends who have to listen to me talking about Minis all the time!”

### TECH SPEC

**BODY** 1966 Morris Mini Traveller, never welded, replacement Innocenti passenger door and rear door, Carello headlamps and indicator lenses replaced with correct Lucas items after purchase. Original five-stud front bumper in storage, Morris grille purchased from Australia. Paint: monotone Tweed Grey.

**ENGINE** 1275cc Metro Vanden Plas A-plus, 265 camshaft, slightly modified head with 35.7mm inlet and 29mm exhaust valves, duplex timing gear, standard radiator with original metal cooling fan, electronic ignition, alternator conversion, original cotton braided wiring loom, HIF44 carb, mechanical fuel pump, Manifold exhaust system.

**TRANSMISSION** Modified three-synchro magic wand gearbox to suit 1275cc engine with 2.9:1 final drive, standard drop gears.

**SUSPENSION** Standard dry suspension, KYB dampers.

**BRAKES** KAD Seven-inch Cooper disc assemblies (front), drums (rear)

**WHEELS AND TYRES** Early Innocenti Cooper steel wheels, Falken 165/70R10 tyres.

**INTERIOR** Standard interior trim with additional map light, Smiths vacuum gauge, Smiths rev counter from unknown source, Alpine head unit, hidden speakers, and curtains for sleep-overs!

