

THE EXTRA MILE

Craig Ormiston's MkII Cooper S has been professionally restored by Competition Classics, a firm that went above and beyond to search for model-specific parts

Words: Karen Drury Photos: Jim Jupp



Like so many other Mini fanatics, Craig Ormiston's love of the model began as soon as he hit the road as a young driver.

"My first car, when I passed my driving test, was a 1975 Mini Clubman, JCF 298N," recalls Craig. "I bought that with an MoT for £195 and went on to change just about everything on it."

Craig's love of motorsport led him to develop his Mini more radically than most at the time: "I put a 1400cc race engine in it, plus roll bars, and turned it into a quick race car during my time at university. I took it apart so many times that it ended up with

a removable glassfibre front end. It all started my love of Minis, and I actually became addicted to them."

Since then, Craig has owned a number of different cars but always wanted a Cooper S. He started to look around for one in 2017 and decided upon a MkII: "When this one came up on eBay, I bought it because I wanted to get one that was built close to my date of birth. I was born on June 27, 1968 – and according to its Heritage Certificate, this car was built on May 30, 1968, so it's within a month."

After around a year, Craig started to think up a plan for his S, which had

received a few mods over the years and sported non-original parts such as wheelarches and alloy wheels. "It wasn't in good nick and there were plenty of holes," he recalls. "I could have kept it running and put up with it, but considered taking it back to an original spec. According to the Heritage Certificate, it was the right colour of El Paso Beige with a Snowberry White roof. It had the right engine, gearbox casing and shell numbers. I was either going to spend a small amount of money keeping it going or a lot on a full restoration."

This is where Chris Greenwood of Competition Classics enters the story,

recommended by a friend of Craig's who'd had an Aston Martin and a Jaguar E-type restored by the East Sussex-based specialist. "I looked at them and thought that he'd done a really good job. I went to see Chris and decided that he should restore the S back to as original condition as possible."

Chris has owned Minis himself and his mechanic, Dom Kenning, also knows them really well, which was useful on a lengthy project such as this. A number of shortcuts can be taken during any Mini rebuild, as many components are interchangeable across a variety of different versions, but immense

dedication and patience are required to source year-correct and model-specific parts.

Chris and Dom stripped the shell to bare metal and discovered that it had been painted many different colours over the years. "It's had lots of new panels, as the shell work was pretty extensive," explains Craig.

Chris confirms this: "It needed a new floor, new rear, boot floor, an A-panel repair and new wings. The doors were brand new from British Motor Heritage, the bootlid is new, as are the rear quarters. The »



Craig's first foray into Mini ownership was with a sprint example.

bonnet had a crease, so that too is brand new. The floor was like a patchwork quilt, so it now has the correct new full floor with the plate for the magic wand in it. The sills have four flutes and are from M-Machine." All the bodywork repairs were carried out by Mark Wanstall of Rightline Motorsport in Kent.

Back together

By August 2021, the MkII S bodyshell was ready for painting in its original

colours. Competition Classics now has its own paint shop, but at that time Chris tasked Jessop Motor Bodies of Yorkshire with painting Craig's shell in two-pack. "Rick and Rob came highly recommended for painting Minis," says Chris, "and they did a fantastic job."

Externally, many items were salvaged, including the windows that still have their original date stamps and which were polished to remove all scratches. The badges are also original. "I wish we could have found a proper set

of bumpers," laments Chris. "These look fine but they're stainless."

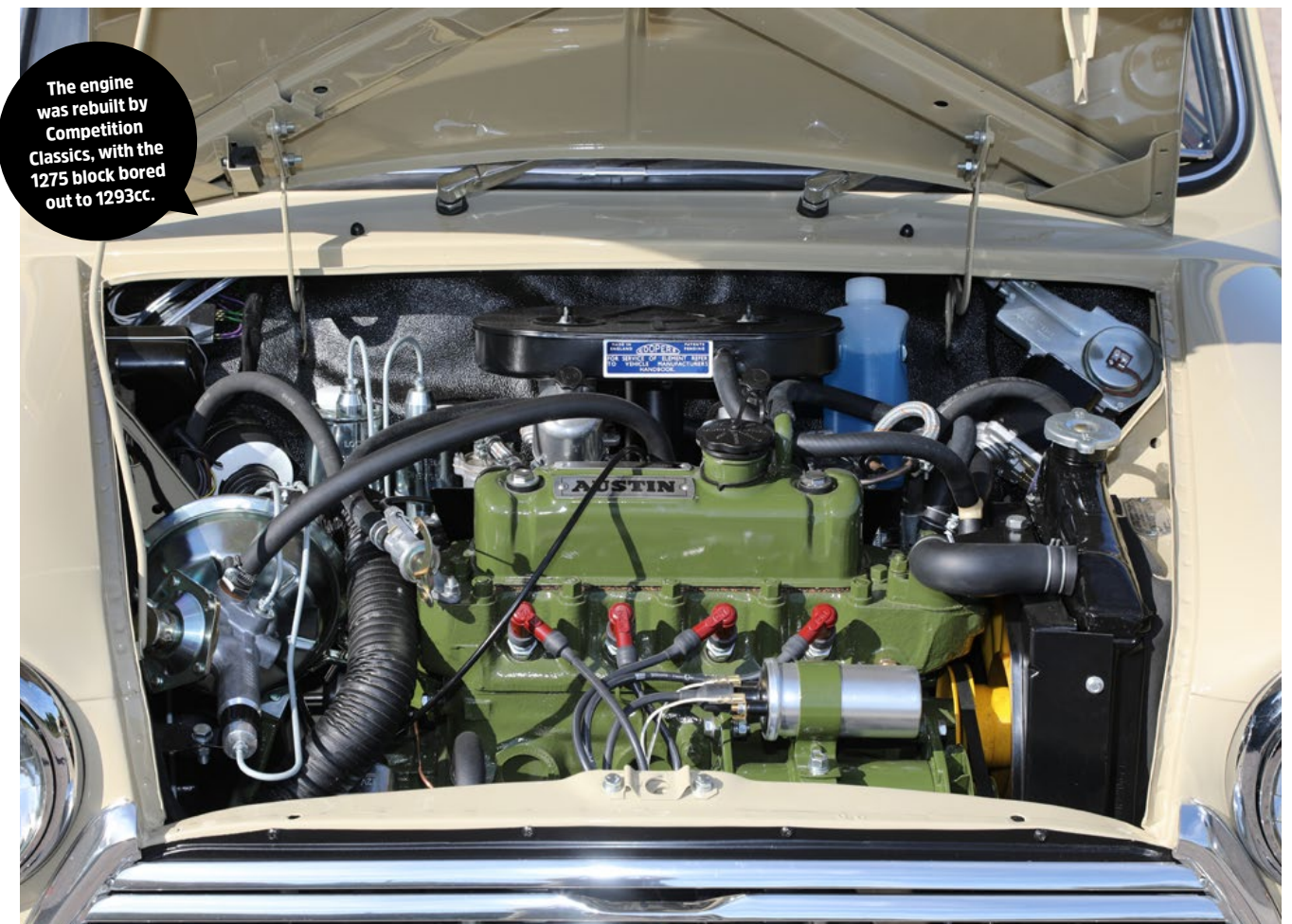
Chris and Dom rebuilt the engine, as Chris explains: "It's fully rebuilt with new shells, new pistons, new rings and new valves. The block had a rebore, so it's now 1293cc. Apart from that, it's gone back together completely stock but with unleaded valve seats in the cylinder head. The rad was cleaned, flushed and checked by Guildford Radiators, who are very good."

Although they reused what they

could, a new wiring loom was bought from Autospark and new brake pipes from Nippy Cars. "Most people fit copper brake pipes, yet when they left the factory they were steel," explains Chris. "The coil and the starter switch are obviously new. We rebuilt the carbs and had the regulator rebuilt. We started to refurbish the original servo but unfortunately it was beyond economical repair so had to replace with a new part. We rebuilt the original fuel pump and most of the components under the bonnet – everything bar the servo – and the master cylinders are original. Details even include the wire hose clips – they're horrible to use but that's what it used to have."

The gearbox was rebuilt by Dom, who recalls having trouble locating some of the correct internals: "It was a particular toothed first-motion shaft. It took loads of ringing around to find it, but I eventually managed to locate one at Southam Mini & Metro Centre."

Craig adds: "Most people would put the car onto a full-synchro set-up for ease of driving, but the gearbox still has a non-synchro first gear." Interestingly, Mini all-synchromesh »



gearboxes were introduced to the UK-spec MkII S later in 1968.

Inside job

The original black vinyl front seats were stripped, the frames powder-coated and new foams fitted. They'd hoped to reuse the original seat covers, but it wasn't to be: "It's such a shame," says Dom, "as one had a split at the bottom, in the middle. The rest of the car looked so good that it was going to let it down, so we got new ones from Newton Commercial." The rear bench seat cleaned up nicely, as did the door cards and the original sun visors, but the headlining needed replacing.

Although the gearstick and its knob are original, the Mini had come to Craig with a Mountney steering wheel, and so a correct one was sourced on eBay and Chris found the right centre for it.

"The interior light wasn't the best," recalls Dom, "so we found one on eBay for £120. It took us ages to find silly bits like the interior lighting door-pin switches."

"The speedo and gauges are original," says Chris. "I had them professionally refurbished by Alan Davies of The Gauge Shop. He's very good and even cad-plates all the backings, so they look brand new now."

Dom, who did 90 per cent of the reassembly, had his work cut out »



"The doors were brand new from British Motor Heritage, the bootlid is new, as are the rear quarters"

The bootlid would originally have sported a '1275' badge to denote the engine size.



The original fuel tanks were refurbished but replacement fuel caps were sourced.



Craig Ormiston is delighted with his sensational Cooper S.



This Cooper has been repainted in its rare original colours of El Paso Beige with a Snowberry White roof.

"It had to be right, otherwise we were throwing away all the good work we'd done up until then"

when it came to the heater, which is a particularly rare version: "These were only fitted for a couple of months and it was all cracked and broken. We took it apart and put a new matrix in, but the old motor had blown. I took the motor apart, cleaned, stripped and painted it. Before I started cleaning it, I measured the size and height of each letter and took pictures of the font, and we had that all recreated in waterslide transfers."

This Mini had been converted to dry rubber cone suspension at some point, so Craig was keen to reinstate the fluid-filled Hydro system, as Dom

explains: "The subframes were correct but it had been converted to dry. We found a secondhand set of displacers and sent them away to Hydragas & Hydrolastic Service to have them re-valved, painted and re-hosed."

Craig acknowledges that he was guided by the Competition Classics team to go the extra mile to get the details right, which inevitably meant that the project lingered a little, ultimately taking four years: "In the end, I could have cut many corners and saved a small fortune, but Chris was keen that we didn't put wrong bits on it when we'd come so far. It had to be right,

otherwise we were throwing away all the good work we'd done up until then. So, he drove the originality of it."

Craig's Mini was finished in 2022. At the time of writing, he's not had many opportunities to drive it but he's absolutely thrilled with the end result: "I have no intention of selling the Mini – it's going to stay with me, hopefully for a long time. I think it's stunning, and I've not seen as clean a car as this in a long time. When you see it in the metal, and appreciate how good it is, it's a million times better than when it came from the factory. In fact, it's almost too well restored." 



Dunlop Aquajet radial tyres really add to the 1960s look.