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(08:30 March 29, 2004)

2003 Mini Cooper S: Third-quarter update

Significant Other: The darling of our fleet has us thinking far into the future

By [CARRIE ROCA](#)



(Photos by Roger Hart)

HERE AT AUTOWEEK, there may be no better indicator of how impressed we are with a long-term car than when we start investigating the possibility of making it a permanent part of our lives. Our Mini Cooper S, in its third quarter, has us thinking that way, daring to contemplate "till death do us part..."

And it's not all about looks, no matter what you might think. For some, those big white stripes on that red hood—not to mention its fetching, compact design—are all it takes to make the Mini the prettiest face in the parking lot. But the car has shown itself to have deeper, more lasting attributes.

First off, our Mini is not high maintenance. Yes, there were some little things last quarter—a couple of broken interior bits and a rattle here and there, which the dealer

THIRD-QUARTER

**MILES (QUARTER/
TOTAL):** 5712/17,215
FUEL MILEAGE: 25.27
mpg
MAINTENANCE: None

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fixed. We basically drive the car hard, to little ill effect, doing not much more than changing its oil and rotating its tires at the manufacturer's recommended intervals. All in all, it is holding up well.

It's not costing us a fortune in gas, either. Between a trip up north (a one-way distance equivalent to the trip from Detroit to Bowling Green, Kentucky) and commuting back and forth to the office, the Mini has averaged 25.27 mpg, proving it appreciates the value of a dollar.

Our Mini has its priorities straight as well, and practicality is one of them. It swallows a mountain of stuff in back—crates of soft drinks and other bulk foodstuffs—yet remains one of the most easy-to-park vehicles we've ever driven (can you say both of an SUV?). It will squeeze into the tiniest spot in the grocery store lot, while parallel parking downtown is a breeze. You really can get four people in it when you need to, but with the back seats down, it performs like a much bigger vehicle, with room for snowboards, groceries, hunting equipment, whatever. We've yet to grow bored with all the things the Mini can do, and doubt we ever will.



That's because as useful as the Mini is, it is also as go-kart-responsive as it was the day we first took its wheel, charging into turns and zipping through traffic like a pro. Working its gears is easy to get used to and if ever there was a drivetrain perfect for a six-speed, this is it. It can run hot or it can just cruise, whatever you're feeling in the mood for.

"You'd have to hit a racetrack to discover everything this car can do," says one smitten staffer. "The six-speed gearbox and shifter are near-perfect in my book and the brakes are instant."

And in spite of its diminutive size, the car makes us feel safe, so what else is there to say? It doesn't matter what kind of day we may have had, we get assigned to drive the Mini Cooper S and all of life's little annoyances just melt away. It keeps us young and it makes us feel good

about ourselves. What more can you ask for in a soul mate?

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