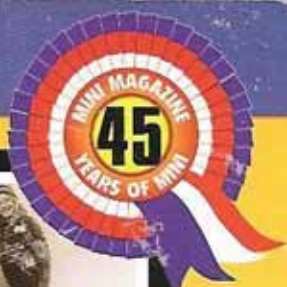
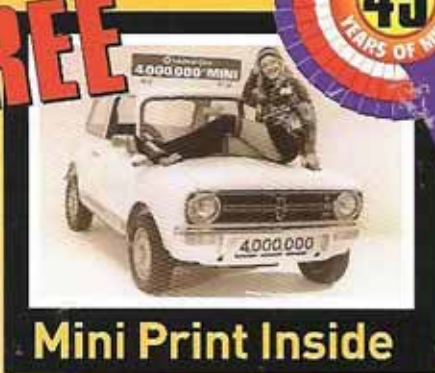


**WIN** Trick MED Cylinder Head



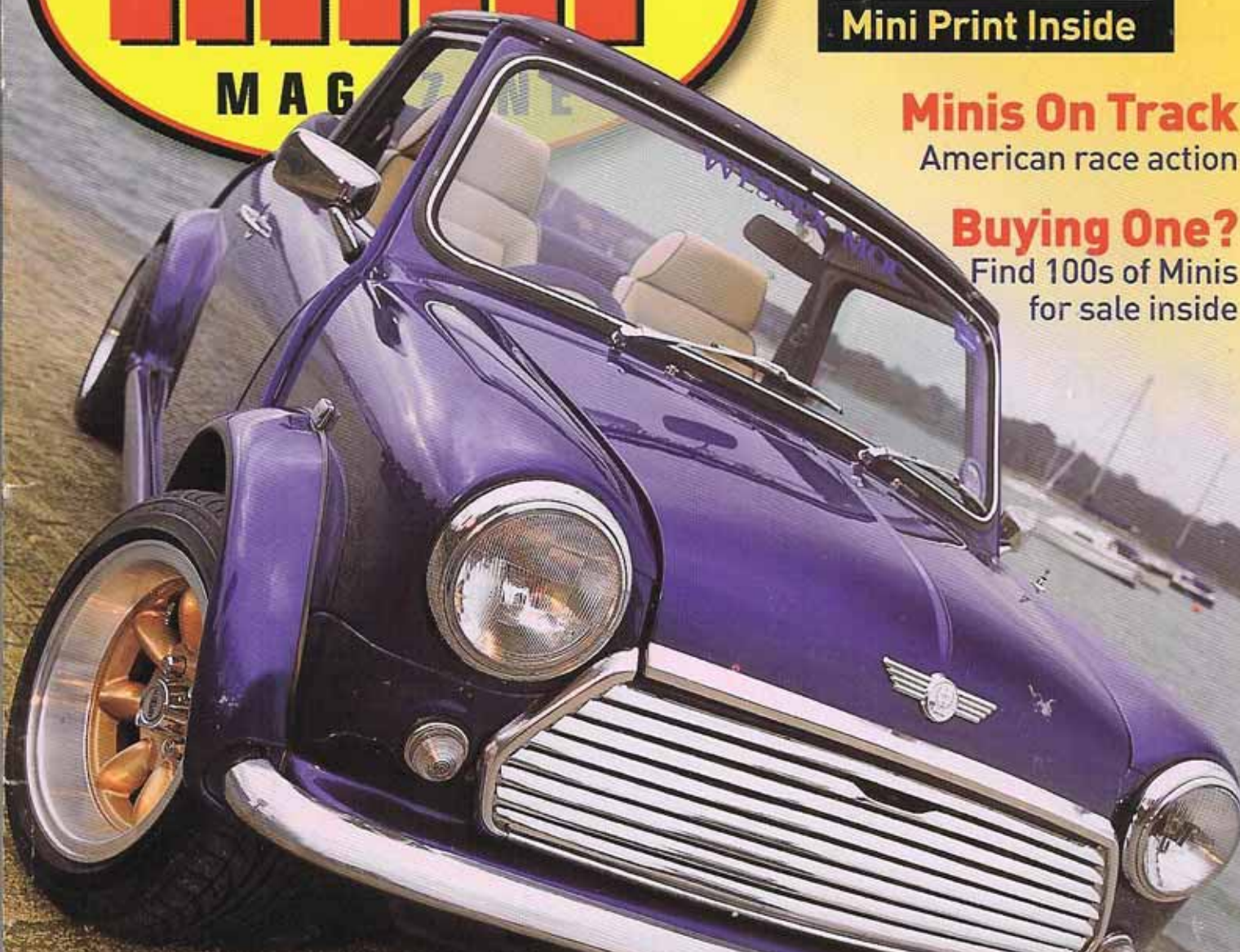
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team heritage



# A RACE APART

It's a hot autumn weekend in Monterey, CA, and Laguna Seca circuit's been invaded by Minis. Gentlemen, start your engines.

Words by Phil White  
Photography by Dave Woodall

**J**imi Hendrix burnt his guitar at the Monterey Festival in 1967 and respectable people were outraged that this drug-fuelled man could be the coolest guy in the world. But then, Monterey was a deadbeat kind of place where counter-culture's grungy goings-on were to be expected. After all, down on the coast was Cannery row, the setting of John Steinbeck's 1945 novel of the same name.

Steinbeck wrote about the abjectly poor, the dispossessed, the underclass. He'd turn in his grave if he could see the peninsula now. Take Carmel for instance. In the '20s its



shabby appeal made it the haunt of artists. By 1986 it was a town famous for its ultra-conservative administration. When local star Clint Eastwood became mayor for two years, the place lightened up, but it's still known as a beacon of conformity and uptightness.

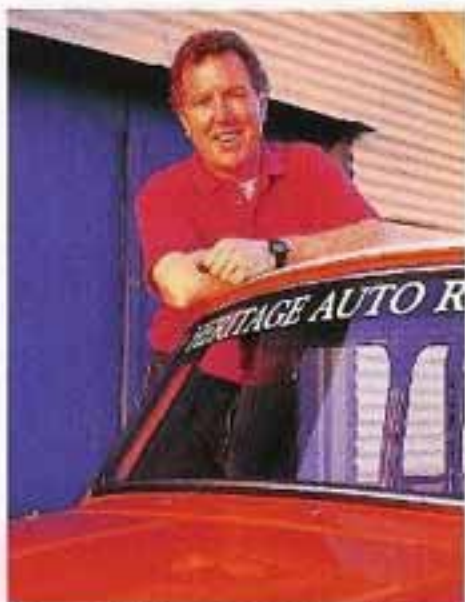
So is Pacific Grove, where *Mini Magazine* was billeted for the weekend. We rolled up after an epic drive up the Pacific Coast Highway, looking forward to a frosty beer as a reward. Pacific Grove started as a Methodist summer camp resort and still hasn't gained a bar or pub. A bunch of very clean kids were gathered outside the cappuccino and juice

joint, striking half-hearted poses of rebellion. It's not easy to kick butt in a place with immaculate picket fences — still harder when each guards a \$2,000,000 property.

But there's a little oasis of fun that the dark, drab forces of millionaireshood haven't been able to stop. In 1950, road racing began at Pebble Beach, along the twists of the Del Monte forest. It proved popular, to the point where the mass of spectators and racers caused friction with the local communities. Rather than give up on good sport and a healthy earner, enthusiasts formed the Sports Car Racing Association of the



Event's atmosphere is relaxed and friendly.



## Team Heritage – Graham Reid

The Flying Pramplin is something of a classic racing legend, as Graham has campaigned it with success for several years. Once upon a time it was a 1961-850 saloon, but now it bears a high-compression 1350cc engine that features everything Heritage does best. It's quite a company motor, but then if you talk the talk, you have to do the walking too.

As a result, the car has one of the most sorted chassis in American classic racing and is lightened anywhere possible. Crouching low on six 0 Mamba alloys it looks mean and nasty. And boy oh boy, it delivers.



Winner of the VMC's Vintage Spirit award...



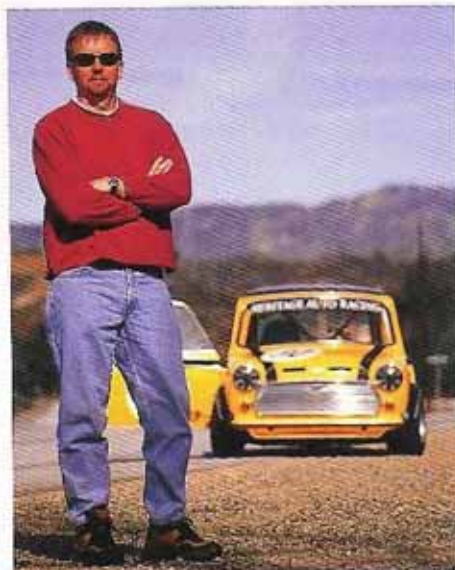
... and the VMC's Best Prepared Mini award.

Monterey Peninsula, or SCRAMP for short. Catchy, isn't it?

This gathering of hot-heads was dynamic. It leased some land from the local military base at Fort Ord and laid out its own circuit. Most British race circuits are quite flat owing to their origins as airfields. Laguna Seca, on the other hand, is much more undulating. It's similar in intention, if not in epic scale, to the greatest scenic route of all time, the Nürburgring, but a good deal shorter at 2.2 miles.

When it first began it was shorter still, at 1.9 miles. The extra bit was added in the early '80s. But Laguna Seca Raceway packs a lot into the distance. There are 14 significant curves or bends and 10 decent straights. The track curls in on itself, dipping round a pair of lakes to make good use of its site. Best of all, it winds up and down hills, and from one high knoll you can see almost the whole place. Where the Nordschleife is a huge rump through thickly wooded mountains, Laguna Seca winds over dusty, dry hills. It gets hot here, when the unpredictable peninsula weather allows it to.

Which is just what we need. Back home in the UK, winter has set in with ferocious intent, so we're glad to see the sun break through the mist the next morning, as we follow Graham Reid from our hotel to the circuit. Regular readers have met Graham before. An ex-pat from Scotland, he runs



### Scott Crawford

Scott's beautiful Britax replica racer is the poster boy of the Heritage squad. It's won several awards for presentation, including the odd concours trophy. But it's no preening ninny, as it acquits itself pretty well on track, too.

A few years back this was a 1962 Cooper shell, bearing the scars of innumerable accidents. But Scott laboured intensely to restore it, performing a controversial MkII rear light conversion to replicate the Britax racers. After about 500 hours of hard graft, he handed it over to a paint shop. The result is possibly the best paint job we've ever seen.

With Heritage 1380cc power, a highly developed chassis and Brembo front discs, the car performs as well as it looks, and as Scott hones his racecraft he gets ever-better placings, often crossing the line glued to Graham's tail.

Heritage Autos in Costa Mesa, Los Angeles. Heritage is the area's leading Mini repair and restoration specialist and has a sizeable contingent of racers among its clientele.

We're competing with Team Heritage. Graham and his cohorts are parked in a line, with an old motorhome and awning serving as social club and service area for Graham's own car. Opposite is his old mate Mike Kearney of Mini specialist Seven Enterprises. Mike has rolled up with his awesome, championship-winning GT5 Mini, but it's only here for the pose — he's not racing this weekend, as he is to create the largest barbecue known to mankind for the Mini drivers and entourages. He starts early, as Graham and his merry men get to grips with last-minute preparations. Their first practice and qualifying session is to kick off at 9.10 am.

The sight of all this activity too early in the morning makes the intrepid *Mini Magazine* crew feel slightly queasy, so we go in search of liquid refreshment. I'm delighted to find that thanks to the yuppification of the peninsula, the Indian spiced tea — chai — is on the menu, bringing snorts of derision from coffee-addict snapper Woodall. Everybody, I tell him sanctimoniously, has their poison.

The stimulant of choice among our Mini owners is, of course, track speed. Regular readers will already know one such addict — Scott Crawford's wonderful yellow Britax-styled Cooper brightened the cover of our May 2002 issue. He has come along with his wife and children for the weekend. Further down the line is Bart Smith's red 1962 Cooper, with wife and kids, and Fred Comes's unmissable turquoise Cooper.

Also here is Alan Berry, owner of the distinctive green and yellow racer — dubbed 'Swamp Thing' because of its habit of leaving the track and going native — which appeared in our September 2003 issue. As a result, Team Heritage HQ was buzzing with children of various ages and small boys' toys lay scattered on the ground between their fathers' full-size playthings.

The Minis were all assembling for the first session as we finished our drinks, so we wandered over to see Laguna Seca do its thing. This Fall Vintage Classic meeting was being run by the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) which provided, among other things, a chirpy bunch of fire marshals. "It's a great social thing really," one of them grins. "We eat together, drink together and have a good time. It's a kinda family thing too. My daughter's crewing for one of the teams today."

Early the next day, the marshals took us for a tour of the track. Its compact size means the bends come up with astonishing speed. There's the full range of turns too, wide-open curves, a ferocious hairpin and the legendary Corkscrew, an incredible blind left and right over a brow and into a steep incline. "I've got it so wrong, so many times," says one of our company. "You can feel you know it, but still get caught out even if you've done nothing wrong." It's not a challenge to be taken lightly, as it's claimed lives. ➤





Elsewhere the circuit's incredibly safe, with huge gravel run-offs. Heritage racing in the US is a non-contact sport, the idea being that the cars deserve to make it through relatively intact. Which meant that when Bart overcooked a fast right-hander, he spun backwards into gravel emerging with nothing worse than a dusty car and a big grin. There is the occasional dent however, which is how I ended up later that evening helping a driver rivet back the nose cone on his Lola.

Our racers were going great guns and having a good time. They were all running in Group 2, Small Bore Production cars. Their races featured a picturesque field of Minis, Porsche 356s, MGs, Triumph Spitfires, one brave Datsun 510 and a bonkers Abarth-powered Fiat 500. The racing was quite close, with three definite packs emerging. Among the front runners were Graham and Scott, with Fred and Bart mixing it a few yards back in the middle. On a tight twisting circuit such as Laguna, the Minis can play their trump card of awesome handling to ace machinery with much more powerful engines.

Watching Mini after Mini barrel into a challenge such as the Corkscrew, you fully understand how important suspension set-up can be. Highly developed cars such as Graham, Scott and Fred's turn in more sharply and almost oversteer, finding the exit line with ruthless efficiency. Bart, who is working towards an end point with his chassis, was dealing with more understeer.

It didn't mean he had any less fun than the others though, and every Heritage driver emerged utterly amped by their experience, as were all the other Mini racers on the park, even their mate Kevin Curtin. Dressed in black, driving a black truck and black Mini,



Mini Owners of America, San Francisco.



## Alan Berry

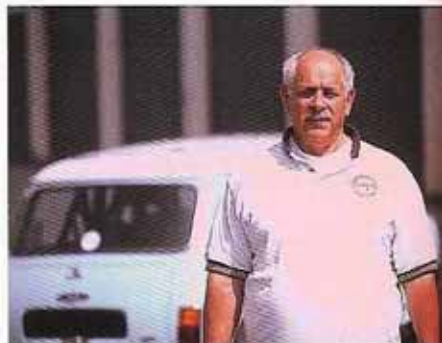
Alan Berry's green and yellow monster is a Mini with a story behind it. Four years ago, Alan was racing at a helicopter base and hit a concrete kerb, which then launched his Mini 8 ft over an embankment and into a not-so-pleasant swampy gloom — hence the Mini's name — Swamp Thing.

It might have a reputation but when it comes to track events, this Mini's no slouch and can usually be found fighting for places on the winner's podium, rather than hanging around in marshy undergrowth. The car features a 1275 engine bored 40 thou, a Stage 4 head and tonnes of other authentic race mods, including a fibreglass front end and bootlid, GB alloys and a stripped out interior. Despite all the work, Alan still takes a light-hearted view on the series though: "You know you're a Vintage Racer when you buy an expensive battery and save 5 lb, but are 30 lb overweight yourself!"

he displays a tattoo of dancing skeletons on his pale skin. "Death's kinda my thing," he intones, handing us both skeletons to hang from our rear-view mirrors.

The only harm any of us sustained, though was internal bruising from over-ingestion of barbecued food. Everyone had a superb racing weekend, and Graham walked away with a Second in Class. They were cheered on by a large posse from the Mini Owners of America San Francisco, assembled in a corner of the paddock. We wanted them parked close together for a photograph and Woodall needed a high vantage point for the shot. The organisers wanted them away from the foot-bridge he'd chosen — tempers flared and ruffled feathers had to be soothed.

Finally we had all our pictures and our friends were loading their trailers for the drive home to Los Angeles. "Any distance is worth it for fun like this," Bart smiles. "What a damn fine weekend."



## Fred Comes

Fred runs a construction company, yet his car has no windows. You can only hope his house is better equipped. Still, a racing Mini has no need of glass in the heat of California. What it does require is plenty of power and minimal weight, which is what it boasts, thanks to preparation by Heritage.

The 1968 shell is lightened and beautifully presented in duck-egg blue. Fred himself doesn't think it's utterly spic-and-span, but he doesn't really care. "It may not be the most pristine car," he says, "but goddammit, I'm having some fun in this sucker!"

The fun factory is a 1380cc engine refined by Heritage, with some suspension trickery to make the most of the power. This chassis features appreciable negative camber front and rear, with anti-roll bars at each end too. However, in my mind the car's greatest asset is its passenger seat. At some point I have to blag a shotgun ride.

## Bart Smith

When you name your son Cooper you nail your colours to the mast and Bart Smith is a consummate Mini fan. So it's fitting that he has one serious Mini to play with. It was once a 1962 Cooper, although it now lives in a 1959 shell.

Under the bonnet is a full 1275cc Heritage Racing engine, fully balanced, lightened and polished and using Omega pistons. A 45 DCOE Weber carb provides plenty of race fuel. Being a lead-footed sort of bloke, Bart uses a practically unbustable Special Tuning straight-cut gearbox with Tran-X drop gears.

Bart is climbing through the field as he learns his racecraft, fuelled by boundless enthusiasm and quite a bit of talent. He's an easy-going sort of chap and thanks to a relaxed attitude to his racing, he has a great time, all of the time. Even when he spins off. "Well," he says after an excursion into the gravel, "you gotta try, haven't you."

