


# ALL DRESSED UP

Last on the road in 1983, Roger Griffiths' genuine Wood & Pickett Margrave Mini has been brought back to life, and then some....

Words Martyn Jones Photography Gerard Hughes

**Y**es, Alec Issigonis was undoubtedly autocratic and eccentric, but he was also a pioneering and inventive genius who somehow managed to squeeze the proverbial quart into a pint pot. He frowned on frivolity, despised luxuries and had a missionary zeal for minimalism, which meant that the Mini was uncompromisingly simplistic in an effort to maximise interior space. Despite this lack of creature comforts however, the Mini had a few more aces up its sleeve. Not least that it was a 







The sumptuous Margrave interior is absolutely stunning.

hoot to drive with terrific cornering ability, and trendy too.

As a result, this nimble, cute, and above all 'classless' car became the unlikely beneficiary of many celebrity endorsements. A host of glitterati including film idols, pop stars and even royalty all found favour with the Mini, making Issigonis' utilitarian creation baby the epitome of 1960s cool.

## TAILOR-MADE

Yet, it was these celebs, who were used to somewhat more luxurious forms of transport, that spawned the creation of a whole new genre. They loved the fact that the Mini was fun, fleet of foot and, crucially, easy to park in an increasingly-congested London. But they weren't so enamoured with its 'back to basics' trim and 'off-the-peg' appearance. What they coveted was, in effect, a 'mini' Rolls-Royce, tailor-made to their requirements. And thus, the coachbuilt Mini was born.

Rare, opulent, extremely fashionable and very expensive, the coachbuilt Minis were a fascinating take on the Mini story, which is widely-acknowledged to have begun with actor Peter Sellers' Mini Cooper. Late in 1962, Sellers asked prestige car dealership H.R. Owen if it



The leather trim has been fully refurbished.



Margrave 'Elite' dash with Smiths gauges.

## "The coachbuilt Minis were a fascinating take on the Mini story..."

could transform his new Cooper into something that mirrored his new Rolls Royce, so the dealership commissioned Hooper Motor Services to undertake the conversion. At a cost of £2600 – a standard Cooper was just £679 – Sellers' Cooper, with its Bentley-style headlights, hand-stencilled wicker-work, leather interior, electric windows, rear heater and a multitude of other indulgences, soon had other celebrities following suit.

But, having set the scene with Sellers' Mini, Hooper quickly moved away from coachbuilding and didn't want to

continue the practice. It was persuaded to convert a handful of further Minis for existing clients however, marketed under the 'Supreme' name. Hooper also created a few hatchbacks, including one for Sellers in 1963.

When Hooper dropped the coachbuilt Mini baton, other companies picked it up and ran with it – companies such as soon-to-be market leaders Radford and Wood & Pickett. The car you see on these pages is a prime example of the coachbuilders' art and how it evolved – a 1974 Wood & Pickett Margrave Mini Clubman



The bodywork has been deseamed, but retains roof gutters to keep the rain out.



Folding rear seats, but without boot access!

belonging to long-time coachbuilt Mini enthusiast, Roger Griffiths.

## TWO TO ONE

Welshman Roger is no stranger to the pages of *Mini Magazine*. His black Wood & Pickett Mini and his custom red MPi were both featured in our September 2016 issue. He'd always lusted after a coachbuilt Mini but could never afford one when they were new, so his 1992 and 1999 Minis went some way to redressing the balance. What he really wanted was a '70s W&P Mini though, so when the chance to buy this utterly delightful 1974 Margrave came up, he jumped at it and the others were later sold. Based on a



Roger has fitted a modern Sony head unit.

standard Clubman, OKT 919M was converted from new by Wood & Pickett, with no expense spared. It's not always looked as good as it does now though.

"Back in 1983, the then owner stripped the car in readiness for a rebuild," explains Roger. "But, for whatever reason, the rebuild was never completed. The bodyshell had been repainted, and it was on its suspension and wheels, but not much else had been done. It remained in this state until 2013. I could see from the documentation that came with the car that the owner had regularly been buying parts. Nevertheless, none had been fitted. In 2013, a friend bought it from him, along with the boxes and boxes of parts, rebuilt it, and put it up for sale. I bought it in October 2016."



Plush leather trim is just about everywhere!

Roger worked in the motor trade from his teens until his relatively recent retirement, and is a real stickler for quality. Although the Margrave had been rebuilt, Roger was keen to go through the car with a fine-toothed comb and transform it into the very best example possible. And as you can tell from the photographs, he's succeeded!

"I've been around Minis since the

# WOOD & PICKETT MARGRAVE

The original 998 engine has been replaced with a 1275cc A-plus unit. It's beautifully detailed.



mid-1970s, working on customers' cars in the family garage business, and I've done plenty of work on my own Minis too," recalls Roger. "With this particular car I was aiming for concours condition, and I wanted it to be A1 mechanically too. Over a four-month period, I refurbished the mechanical components and brought the bodywork and interior up to Wood & Pickett standards. I've spent hundreds of hours on it."

Roger immediately knew he would have to replace the original gearbox as the casing had cracked and was leaking oil. As it transpired, he not only changed the gearbox, but also changed the engine too. "There was nothing wrong with the 998," continues Roger, "but I was offered a 1275



Wolftrace wheels with neat spinners added.

New H4 lamps sit in the original W&P grille.



A-plus unit from a 1993 Mini that had only done 5000 miles since it was rebuilt. I fancied the extra urge, so I bought it and had it fitted by Mantis Garage near Birmingham. Apart from the Manifold LCB manifold and system, electronic ignition and a four-core radiator, it's standard. It's got plenty of go though."

With the engine and gearbox installed, Roger went through the steering, suspension and braking system, renewing the hubs, bearings, ball joints and tie-rods as he went. Cooper S callipers have been joined by grooved discs and new pads up front, while at the back Roger went for finned aluminium drums and new brake shoes. Plus, to improve the handling and achieve the ride height he was after, he fitted new gas-filled dampers



New brightwork includes the fuel filler caps.

and Hi-Los all round. "It's not too low," says Roger. "I've kept things sensible as it's a town car, so nothing racey."

## LITTLE LUXURY

Satisfied that the Margrave was mechanically perfect and sitting pretty, Roger then turned his attention to the exterior and the interior. By the '70s, Wood & Pickett had really gone to town on the details when creating its cars, and this one is no exception. The body has been deseamed, including the roof guttering at the rear, and the doors feature Innocenti quarter-light windows. It's also had the W&P custom grille and headlamp treatment, with a Vauxhall Victor FD item modified to suit the Clubman front. "The bodyshell was in

The car was first dismantled in 1983, but only returned to the road in 2016!



New Tex mirrors and quarter-light windows.



Neat Margrave badging joins the rear wiper.

## “As well as making the car look good, I wanted to make it personal...”

excellent condition,” enthuses Roger. “The only thing it’s had are new sills from what I can see – all the floors and boot floor are still original, and when I took the twin tanks out you could see how well the deseaming had been done. The car was well-specced too. It had the vinyl roof and an electric sliding steel sun roof, electric windows, leather-covered Recaro seats, a sumpguard and twin tanks. But, as well as making it look good, I wanted to make the car personal to me, a bit like Wood & Pickett would have done.”

Having spent quite some time renovating the 30-year-old paintwork, which had dulled slightly, Roger focused on the exterior trim. “It was originally supplied with the full ‘Heritage’ pack, which included the stainless steel wiper arms and tread plates, moulded arches, and nudge bars,” elaborates Roger. “I

added the chrome trim around the waistline and rear number plate, then fitted new but period mirrors and fuel filler caps, the special door handle escutcheons and quartz halogen headlights with flat glass.

“I also had the chromework re-done and I re-fitted the front nudge bar,” Roger adds. “I decided not to fit the rear nudge bar, which came with the car, as I think it clutters the styling too much. The wheels are genuine Wolfrace ones and another Wood & Pickett optional extra. However, I modified some centre caps with a Dremel so I could fit spinners to them, which came from Huddersfield Spares. I fit spinners to all of my Minis. It’s a personal thing!”

Not content with just making the exterior a work of art, Roger also went to town on the interior. “It already had

## TECH SPEC

**BODY** 1974 Wood & Pickett Margrave Mini Clubman restored with new sills, de-seamed including the roof guttering at the rear, quarter-light windows, W&P modified Vauxhall Victor FD grille, replacement H4 headlamps, vinyl roof, electric sliding steel roof, twin tanks, chrome waistline trim, new Tex mirrors, W&P and Margrave badges, side repeaters, W&P moulded arches, stainless steel wiper arms and tread plates, door handle escutcheons, front nudge bar, brightwork re-chromed. Paint: Metallic blue.

**ENGINE** Rebuilt 1275cc A-plus engine, stock internals, finned aluminium rocker cover, chrome radiator bracket, Smiffy’s Bits cylinder head bolt covers, SU electric fuel pump, Mini Spares alloy inlet manifold, Manifold LCB, Manifold exhaust system with twin side-exit upswept pipes. Estimated power: 70bhp.

**SUSPENSION** Dry set-up, fully rebuilt, new gas-filled dampers and Hi-Los all round.

**TRANSMISSION** Rebuilt four-speed rod-change gearbox, 3.1:1-ratio final drive.

**BRAKES** Rebuilt with new 7.5-inch Cooper S disc assemblies with grooved discs (front), finned aluminium spacer drums (rear), remote servo, new lines and hoses.

**WHEELS AND TYRES** 5x10-inch Wolfrace slot mags with modified centre caps to accept Huddersfield Spares spinners, 165/70x10 Falken tyres.

**INTERIOR** Wood & Pickett Margrave interior with Elite dash featuring extra Smiths gauges, electric windows, restored beige leather trim including Recaros front seats and folding rear seats, ‘West of England’ cloth headlining, W&P wood gear knob and steering wheel, Paddy Hopkirk throttle pedal, Easirider lambswool over-rugs, restored carpets, Sony head unit, rear shelf speakers, carpeted boot area.



It's been built for comfort rather than outright speed, but it still goes well!

the exclusive Wood & Pickett 'Elite' dashboard and extra instrumentation," says Roger. "I invested in very expensive and super quality lambswool front over-rugs, which were a period option. I got them from Easirider, who used to make them for Wood & Pickett. The seats and doorcards were in good condition, but the leather had dried. I sent them to Autoretrim to be treated, and it also repaired the original carpets for me."

On Roger's Margrave, the rear seats fold. But, unusually, the rear bulkhead hasn't been cut out. "This was yet another Wood & Pickett option," says Roger. "The opening would allow the owner to fit golf clubs or other large items through the aperture. For some reason, my car didn't have this done. It didn't have a radio either, so I've recently installed a modern head unit and mounted two speakers on



Roger finally has the Mini he always wanted.




Twin tanks in the neat carpeted boot area.

## "I'm really chuffed with how the whole car has turned out..."

the rear parcel shelf. They look period. I'm really happy with how the interior has turned out. In fact, I'm chuffed with how the whole car has turned out."

That's a very happy conclusion, for Roger now finally owns the Mini he wanted more than 40 years ago. It's a similar story for the car itself too, which is now being used and enjoyed after 34 long years off the road. The reaction the car gets at shows in Roger's native Pembrokeshire and beyond is phenomenal, and only serves to reaffirm that all the hard work has been

worthwhile. It's a terrific looking car, beautifully finished, impeccably detailed and with a great period vibe. Thanks to some subtle upgrades, it's surely even better than it was in 1974.

There was real magic in the way in which companies such as Wood & Pickett took the ordinary and conjured it such a way to make it look extraordinary. These cars were rare and elusive in their heyday, and are even more so nowadays. Thanks to dedicated fans like Roger, that magic has been preserved and remastered for new generations to enjoy. 

Alive and well in Leatherhead, W&P is now part of the Leacy Classics parts group. It specialises in all things Mini and W&P.

