

# pre-production preview

**right** Modelling a particular registration means Sun Star has set itself up for criticism, but even *MiniWorld's* Monty admits there's little to fault.



## Sun Star's 1959 Mini

**NEW**  
**1:12 SCALE**

**Monty Watkins, Editor** of *MiniWorld* magazine, steps up to give an expert and in-depth critique of Sun Star's new 1:12 scale 1959 British icon

I am a Mini anorak, but I'm not a model Mini collector. Why on earth not? It would be the obvious lifestyle extension. I've seen one or two Mini models cross my desk at *MiniWorld* over the last 14 years and, quite frankly, anyone who is interested in accuracy could not take any of them seriously. Apart from some rather rare and excellent models from the 1960s, most are just Mini look-alikes.

I'm very curious as to why so many Mini models of the last couple of decades are so slack. The original cars are out there, and most owners would be pleased to let a conscientious model maker loose with a camera.

So I took a quick look when this prototype Sun Star 1:12 1959 Morris Mini-Minor turned up. It takes only a quick glance to identify the first four or five detail faults in most Mini models. But this time I was still looking after several moments. Bravely, the manufacturer has not only aimed at a specific model year, Mini's 1959 launch in the UK, but at a specific

Morris Mini-Minor, registration 621 AOK. In 1:12 scale too – a very serious task.

### **A word on dates**

Contrary to popular legend, 621 isn't the first production Mini. From launch and through the 1960s, UK Mini saloons were built as either Morris (Cowley) or Austin

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(Longbridge) cars. Morris built their first Mini-Minor on May 8, chassis number 101, and it was registered 621 AOK. But Austin's equivalent Seven was the first production Mini at Longbridge, built on April 3, 1959, also with chassis number 101.

Through the first three years of production, Morris and Austin had to cure a host of problems and the Mini developed significantly during that period. Typical of the very

earliest months, 621 incorporates a combination of features from base and DeLuxe models. It's been modified and restored over the years and it seems clear that Sun Star has had a very close look and set out to replicate 621 as it is today, rather than a standard Mini-Minor of May 1959.

It's an understandable choice as

there is no real 'standard' for 1959-61. Author John Parnell, who wrote the excellent *Cooper/S* restoration guide, considered another book on early 850 Minis but was unable to find adequate records about specification changes.

### **Interior and glass: 9/10**

It sets out to be a DeLuxe spec, with carpet and opening rear side windows, but there's no attempt to reproduce the grey fleck vinyl.

Front and rear screen rubbers are black, typical of the sub-DeLuxe base model but true to 621's spec.

Seats are produced correctly without the white piping that identified the early Austin Minis. The rear seat back cushion is the later shape and you'd want a 1959 version to cover the rear arches. Top marks for the sliding door windows with single-hole catches and hinged rear side windows – all very delicate, but very pleasing. Driver controls and single white pod are all excellent.

### **Engine bay: 9/10**

There is great attention to detail here, where so few model makers do their homework. The 848cc basic Mini engine is intricately replicated, with side-exit distributor cap, dynamo, single SU HS2 carburettor, four-blade fan and air filter nozzle (correctly for early 1959) pointing towards the radiator. What is also pleasing is the addition of very authentic-looking wiper motor, Lockheed master cylinders, voltage regulator and



**above** Monty awards top marks for the sliding door windows – with the correct single-hole catches too.



**above** So many Mini models fall down on the engine, but Sun Star has done its homework on this 848cc 'basic'.



**above** Front and rear screen rubbers are all black, typical of registration 621 AOK's specification.



**above** The black floorpan inside disappoints, but the driver controls and single white pod make up for it.



**above** Sun Star gets full marks for getting the bonnet panel right, with correct cross bracing and bonnet pin.



**above** The overall colour is a credible version of BMC WT3, Old English White, with that lovely gloss finish.

horn. And the correct metal tags and engine vent pipe on the rocker box are a special treat.

The washer bottle tubing is black and could be routed better. The bottle may be correct for 621 but is not for an early 1959. It's lovely to see the vacuum pipe to the distributor reproduced, although it would add a little more if the wiper push-pull cable was there, and the offside heater coolant pipe does not quite reach its destination on the bulkhead. Bonnet hinges are in the right position but function means

they are a bit beefy compared to the standard. Plus, they are recessed into the front bulkhead, which was not the case with Minis.

**Bodyshell: 8/10**

The fully functioning external door hinges are a joy to behold, along with the correct early style door handles without the safety 'knob' added later on. The interior door furniture detail is ace, with the exception of the check straps missing. The door catches are stylised for function. The bonnet

panel is excellent, with the correct cross bracing and bonnet pin, but the slam panel has a step in it and is missing the striker plate.

The opening boot panel has the correct 'hooked' handle and nice cross bracing detail inside, complete with the protective floor sheet found on some early Minis. Sun Star gets full marks for noticing that the 1959-64 saloon has a full front valance. The '64-on valance, cut away for brake cooling, is so often present on models claiming to represent early

cars. The boot floor is part of the disappointing black plastic floorpan moulding, which lacks the level of detail shown elsewhere. Why take all the trouble with detail and bolt it all to a glaringly 'orrible black pan'?

The overall colour is a credible version of BMC WT3 Old English White, apart from that black floorpan. In its defence, the moulding has nice details. The SU electric fuel pump and rear subframe are nice, although the drum backplates are too large. Front subframe and suspension components are stylised for function and I'm impressed with the large front floorpan footwells, even if they have swages that were not there on the original.

**Other accessories: 8/10**

The Lucas 700 headlamps are very nicely reproduced, as are the orange/red rear lenses. There's not such good detail on the front indicator lenses, although the bright surrounds are there. Tyre tread and profile are very faithful to the original Dunlop crossply and the road wheel looks good with the Morris style bright wheel trim in place. Under the wheel trim, even the wheel nuts are pretty well researched. Delightful!

**Conclusion: 8.5/10**

By some margin this is the best model of a Mini I have ever seen, in any scale. It's heavy, intricate, sophisticated, functional and shows plenty of evidence of extensive research work. The maker has taken on a huge task and done very well. To get the Mini right, in the detail and in the elusive overall proportion, seems something that most model makers are unable to achieve. And even at around £140, it's excellent value for money. **MC**

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