



# A tour Down Under

**love:mini** takes a journey around Queensland and hooks up with some friends.



**I**t's not every day that you get the opportunity to go to Australia. And when the call came in February 2010 to offer me and my family the trip of a lifetime for two weeks in Brisbane, we could only say 'yes please' and 'thank you very much'.

With only two months to prepare, a limited budget and no idea where to begin, we set about researching the area and drawing up places to visit.

Brisbane is Australia's third largest city, located midway up the east coast, and about 12 hours drive north (960km) of Sydney. It is built around the Brisbane River and is surrounded by a bowl of mountains.

When we arrived in early April it was just entering autumn, but temperatures were still reaching

27-30°C. It was quite an adjustment from the chilly 5°C we had been experiencing back in the UK.

We'd not even reached our ride from the airport car park when we spotted our first Mini in Australia. Without hesitating I approached the two lads sat in the classic Clubby and said a quick hello. Unprepared and cameraless, I missed the chance to get a picture, but was chuffed to have seen a Mini so early in the trip.

## MINI loan

After a few days with the family I headed up the coast to Caloundra, where I had arranged to borrow a MINI from Coastline MINI Garage - a BMW/MINI dealership.

The people there were great and

really friendly, much like most of the people we met on our travels. From my short time in the country so far, I'd noticed a lot of differences in the way they do things in Oz.

We sat down and talked about cars in Australia and how they seem to be mainly Asian models. It turns out that the costs of importing European cars severely inflates the end retail price - making them more of a luxury item to many Australians. Back in the UK we take for granted the number of MINIs on the road, but in Australia they are almost as scarce as classics are in England.

And it's not surprising. Having seen how incautiously the majority of the population drive, I too would probably opt for a cheap \$15,000 Suzuki Swift over a \$46,000 MINI





Looking inland from Tamborine Mountain.

Cooper D, like the one we were using. Perhaps BMW could use a bit of BL ingenuity and open up a plant down there to cut import costs and really break into the market.

With new models such as the Moke-a-like Beachcomber - aimed at action/adventure-orientated customers - I for one think the Australian market would be ideally suited to the MINI brand and image, but to-date it's hardly made an impact.

For us though, it was the perfect car. Familiar and fun.

**Fuel costs nearly half of what it does in the UK**

Big enough to fit a family of four and economical enough to go 800km on a full (40-litre) tank. And that's not Driving Miss Daisy-type driving either. But when fuel costs nearly half of what it does in the UK, you can certainly afford to use a bit more.

Driving in Australia was a real eye-opener (well both eyes really) - you need to be super alert to the standard multiple lane system. It was my first experience driving abroad, and with English signs and right-hand drive I thought how hard could it be. Driving itself was fine, but it did take some time to get used to having cars criss-crossing

and overtaking from both sides, the frequent intersections and, dare I say, almost draconian speed limits. I didn't see any rules in force that suggested drivers should 'keep left except for overtaking' and would regularly come up against a rolling roadblock of cars all doing the same speed. And braking distances - I don't think it's ever been mentioned



Posing outside Sundive diving and snorkelling centre in Byron Bay after drying off.



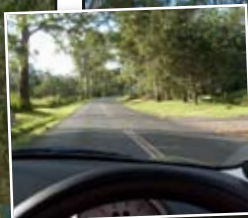
over there with bumper-to-bumper tailgating seemingly the norm. My biggest surprise, though, was to find a brand new motorway had been built to bypass the city - in which the politicians want to cut pedestrian deaths - only to discover it is a toll road, and because of this hardly anyone uses it. As an outsider looking in, it is easy to expect things to be like in the UK, especially being an former British colony,



Lighthouses dotted the coast and offered great views.



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The sign we'd all been waiting to see.

Views to the Gold Coast and beyond...



but unlike New Zealand, Australia looked to the Americans as inspiration in breaking away from the British rule - a rebellion of sorts (like doing the opposite of what your parents tell you to do). And as such you could spot a lot of American influences, even in simple things like road signs.

As with most things though, once you've had time to adjust it quickly becomes second nature, and before long we were taking in some dusty backroads.

## Snorkelling

Our first trip was about two hours south to Byron Bay where we went snorkelling. Having never done it before, we were kitted out in wetsuits and sent for laps in the local hotel swimming pool as guests watched on whilst eating their breakfast. How

embarrassing. After sussing it out we headed out to the beach to help launch the boat which would take us 2km out from the shore to Julian Rocks.

The conditions were perfect and once in the water we saw puffer fish, leopard sharks and lots of reef fish too, it was truly amazing - despite swallowing an unhealthy amount of salty sea water!

The next day we set off to Tamborine Mountain for some amazing views out to the coast and inland. Stopping at a botanical garden - which seem to be everywhere - we soaked up the atmosphere and tranquility of the wildlife and luscious surroundings before enjoying the twisty mountain roads home.

Having driven the Cooper D for a couple of days at this point, I was finding that for a diesel car it lacked



Kookaburra

A deserted botanical garden

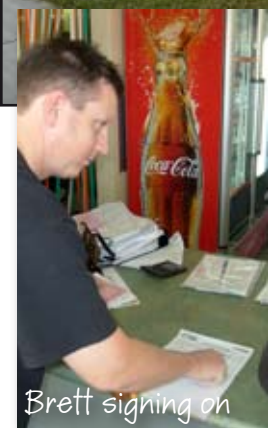


Play areas are everywhere



The road home was a twisty one - perfect for the MINI.





the grunt and torque in the low rev range you'd expect from a diesel. It did have six gears, and is supposedly designed so it can be driven like a petrol MINI, but it is almost etched in stone that diesels are torquey, and this one just wasn't. Nevertheless, it was a fine machine and served us well, covering over 1600km in



## Back in the pits Brett accusing me of ramming him

a week - almost doubling the mileage on the odometer.

On Saturday I

had arranged to meet up with fellow MINI owner Brett Nosse, who had travelled just a few inches on the Australian

map - but a good six hour drive - to come and see me and join in the Mini run the next day. Brett is fortunate

enough to have bought the reg plate 'MINI' for his car, and supersedes what I thought was a cool 'MINI 92' on my loan car. He tells me he's also just bought the 'Cooper S' plate for his classic, so is very much



the envy of some of his fellow enthusiasts.

## Competitive

To make the most of his lengthy journey we decided to go karting. Two 8-minute sessions for \$30-odd bucks wasn't bad and again the weather hadn't let us down. Kitted up and briefed we set off and I set about finding my line. I found one and stuck to it, but it hacked off some of the more experienced racers who were almost queuing up behind



Good to go kick some ass!

Doing the Burnley massive proud.



One of the two karting tracks at Kingston Park Raceway.



me before finding a way past. Time up, and my arms were a little achey, but I was just getting into it. Brett and I checked times only to discover I'd only clocked up two laps. What? It turns out the transponder on the kart was faulty, so all eyes were on the next session.

The 'pros' had gone off and this left us racing similarly experienced people. After chatting to the friendly staff we got put onto a double session - 16 minutes. I started at the back with Brett in front of me. I was feeling good and the rivalry was hotting up as we exchanged fierce words.

Finding an improved line almost instantly I was using the brake a lot less and flying through corners at full throttle, teetering on the edge of the tyres' traction. Buzzing round the track I was overtaking everyone, cutting inside at the corners and battling against the sideways slide.

Ahead I saw Brett on the long straight, with a corner coming up that I take tightly and others go wide. Braking late I cut inside and he swerved off into the tyres, cursing as I sped off to take first place. I was overjoyed.

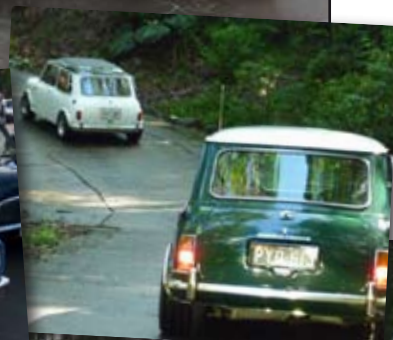
Back in the pit we joked as he accusing me of ramming him, but we'd had fun and set off in good spirits ready for the early start the next day.

## Bowden's Own

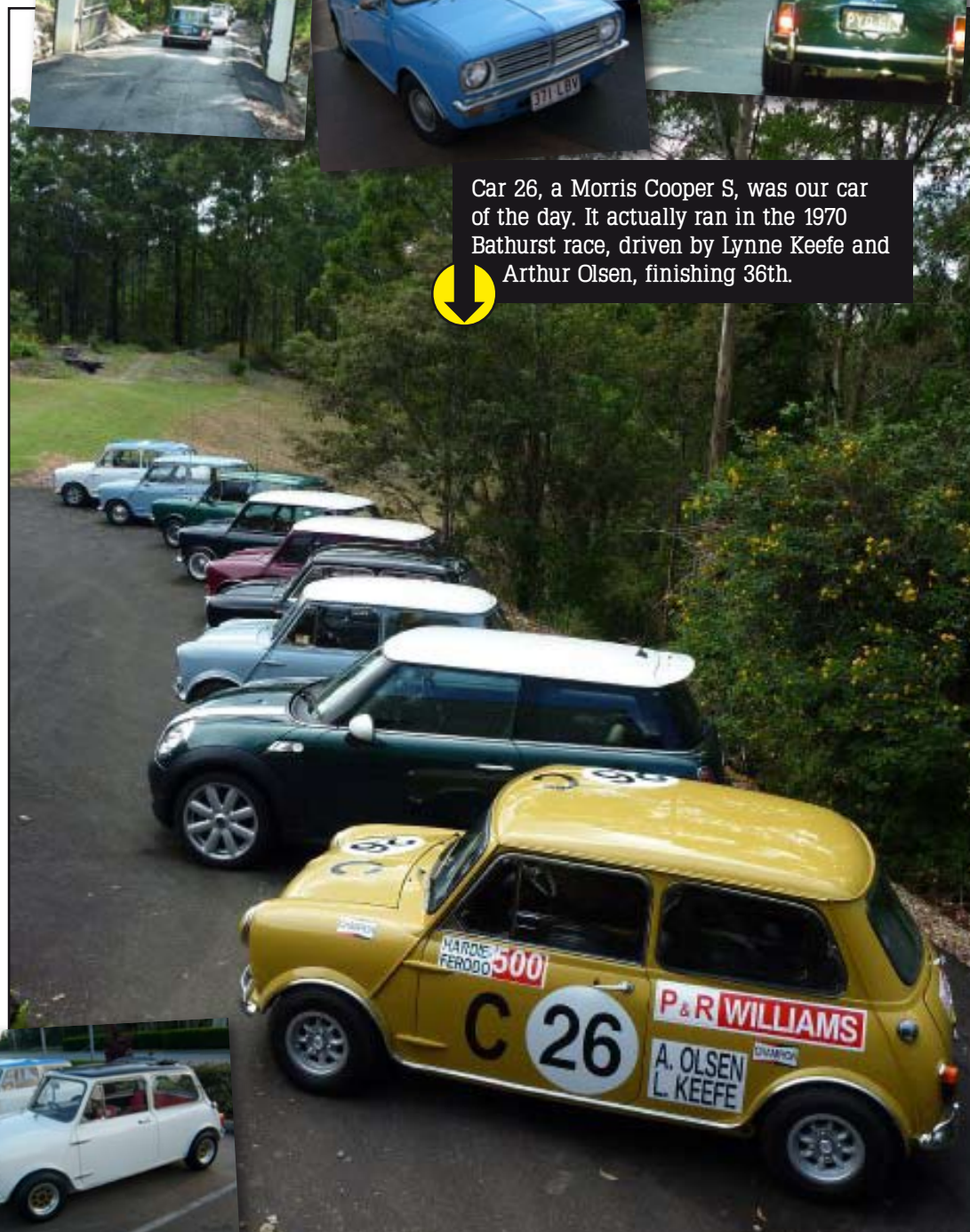
The Mini Club Queensland Inc. had arranged a run while I was in Australia and so I asked to tag along. The trip was about 100km north of Brisbane to Buderim and a famous car collection called Bowden's Own.

It's a family collection started over 35 years ago in order to preserve some

A surprising number of roundnose Minis turned up for the run, and with some cool accessories. Just check out those MB wheels.



Car 26, a Morris Cooper S, was our car of the day. It actually ran in the 1970 Bathurst race, driven by Lynne Keefe and Arthur Olsen, finishing 36th.







## I met up with some other Mini friends for dinner...

of Australia's most prestigious race cars. The collection now boasts over 80 cars and include Australian driving legend Allan Moffat's 1972 Touring Car Championship-winning Ford Falcon GTHO Phase III, Peter 'Brocky' Brock's 1978 Holden LX Torana SS A9X, and Dick Johnson's 1982 Ford XD Falcon named 'Tru-Blu'. The three-hour tour and talk by Dan Bowden explored all the history of these cars, as well as some great stories and anecdotes of the rivalry between drivers and manufacturers at the time.

The garage has also started producing their own car cleaning products after years of research and unsatisfactory results with other brands.

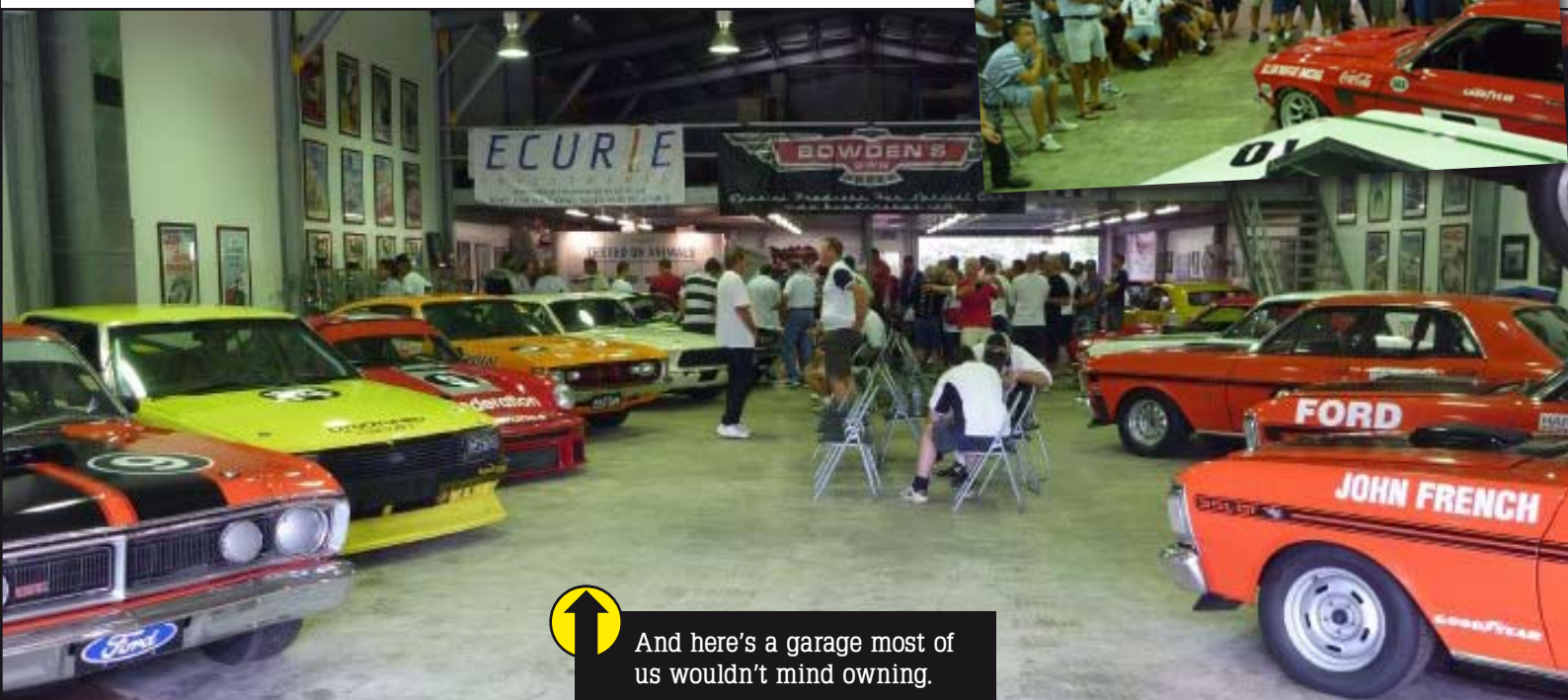


The run itself was a simple affair up the motorway, but it was interesting to see how well kept the classic Minis were. Of course rust isn't so much of an issue with the hot climate, and I doubt many, of the 30 or so, are daily drivers, but you could tell from the likes of MB Wheels, perfect sprayjobs and immaculate engine bays that a lot of love had been lavished on this little lot. We were even graced with a former Bathurst Mini that competed in the great race in 1970. And all too soon it was time to go.

That evening Brett and I met up with some other Mini friends (Jess, Kirsten and Mitchell) for dinner at the best



- Australian historical car collection
- Premium car care products
- Buderim, Queensland, Australia
- [www.bowdensown.com.au](http://www.bowdensown.com.au)



And here's a garage most of us wouldn't mind owning.



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Down  
Under



steakhouse in Brisbane. It was nice to be able to sit and have a decent chat to some new people rather than the usual fleeting conversation, although I did think \$27 just for a steak (no chips) was bit steep.

## Zoo days

Australia Zoo was our last big hit of the week, but when we arrived on Monday we



Finally, a mouth bigger than mine!

found our camera had packed in, so rather than miss out on some memories, we headed to the beach for the day where we built sandcastles and tried to bury my daughter up to her waist - but she was having none of it!

Tuesday then, and the zoo. I'm a big fan of Steve Irwin and it was great to visit the place he loved so much. The animals looked so happy and the enclosures were larger than some UK housing plots.

It was at the arena show where they got up close and personal with the crocs - "This is what you don't do to a croc... (splash splash)" - that it became particularly poignant though, with flashbacks on the big screen of Steve, his passion and his infectious personality. He will be sorely missed.

After the show we took the opportunity to buy a photo posing with a koala - well how often is that going to happen? They also do shots with other animals including a tiger! But it must have been his day off when we went.

In the kangaroo enclosure we were expecting to see maybe a few bouncing around



Lunchtime

in the trees away from the walkway, but far from it. Some \$2 kangaroo food and a walk into the sunshine found a whole gang of them sunbathing on the grass. A bit cautious I approached one with some food, who spritely jumped to his feet and had a little feed. Amazing, I was feeding a kangaroo.

As the day came to a close we headed home, stopping off at the Glasshouse Mountains - narrowly avoiding a wild 'roo on the way. These large uprisings out of the ground are actually formed from volcanic lava. At one time the ground level of the area was the same as at the peak of the mountains, but years of erosion of the surrounding land has exposed them, creating these amazing rocks.

That concluded our MINI tour of the Brisbane area, but it's fair to say that there was still a lot more to see and do! A special thanks must go to Coastline MINI, who, without their help, most of this wouldn't have been possible. If you ever want to buy a MINI in Australia these are the chaps to talk to. ❤️



One of the Glasshouse Mountains.



# Coastline MINI

Sunshine coast dealership delivers a ray of light to new customers.

Just 100km up the coast from Brisbane is where you will find Coastline MINI garage, in the Sunshine Coast town of Caloundra.

Situated on one of the main roads leading into the beachside resort, nestled in amongst a host of other car dealerships, Coastline MINI dominates the road with three MINIs peering over the balcony to be seen from all around.

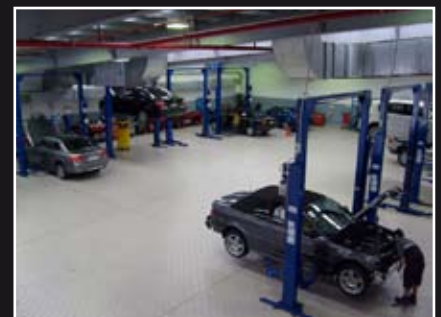
In a purpose-built, stylish and modern building, it's impressive glass structure houses an award-winning team of around 60 professionals that can sell, service or part-exchange a MINI, as well as providing top quality customer service from the moment you step through the door. Such excellence has led Coastline MINI to become the No.1 BMW dealership in Australia.

I spoke to Ryan McCabe and Karen Moye about the dealership and brand. With prices for a base model costing around \$37,500 (and up to \$65k for a Clubman JCW), it's no



surprise the country is dominated by cheaper Asian cars. With European cars seen as a luxury over practical Utes, both Ryan and Karen see how the MINI is still quirky and fun enough to appeal to both the older generation, who remember the classic, and the young who can relate to the whole brand image. And their secret weapon to convince customers to forget about the price tag - a test drive!

With finance deals to suit all, there's no reason why more of Australia couldn't be having more fun driving on those dusty backroads.



## Coastline BMW

- MINI/BMW sales
- MINI/BMW servicing
- Part exchange available
- No.1 BMW dealer in Australia
- Award-winning customer service
- Nicklin Way, Caloundra, Queensland
- [www.coastline.bmw.com.au](http://www.coastline.bmw.com.au)

