



gulp down some clean country air and hang off the exhaust pipes of anything exotic that wants to play.

Fourth gear in the Clio, greenery blurring past the windows, engine sounding competition-car hard-edged as the revs finally hit their sweet spot. There's a tight left ahead and you've just passed the point where common sense says your foot should be on a different pedal. Hit the brakes hard, wringing the final millimetres out of the travel, feeling the car stand on its nose, teeter on the edge of lock-up. Twist your heel right and blip once, twice as your left hand rushes forward through a change to third, then back and across for second. The Clio turns, as you know it will, front Contis sliding a fraction but the chassis as a whole gripping on a supernatural level. Then it's back on the throttle all the way to the bulkhead, urging the revs to climb back up as you watch the Mini ahead reopen

the gap you've just closed.

In the Mini you're cursing the momentary wheelspin as you tried to load the front tyres before you'd wound off all the lock from the left-hander. Reposition yourself in the middle of the seat. Snick up another gear, enjoying the beautifully weighted movement of the silver-topped ball but moving your hand quickly back to the wheel, ready to hang on over the bumps and cambers that are tugging at the Mini's nose. Then it's into a quickish right – flick the nose in and feel the car swivel as though there's a stake just between the gearstick and the handbrake. More movement between the tyres and the road surface, both vertically and laterally; not quite the composure of the Clio. But as the right-hander merges back into a left, the Mini's switch in direction with a small dab on the brakes for confidence is a glorious *small-car jink* that almost snaps your neck with its directness.

And on they go, tearing across the

here's a programme on BBC2 at the moment that everyone seems to be banging on about. It's called Heroes. I watched it the other night. It's no Vicar of Dibley but it's alright. In this drama, 'ordinary' Hollywood people go about their daily lives mingling with the

unwashed populous. But all the time they're blending in, they are also secretly blessed with extraordinary superpowers. From what I can gather, they're like a small troupe of Clark Kents and Peter Parkers who never bother with the spandex.

Now, it occurred to me (and I'll offer this one up to the scriptwriters for free) that if they wanted to add a parallel touch of verisimilitude to the cars that these

'Heroes' drive, then they should buy up a few Clio 197 R27 F1s and Mini Cooper S Works. These are the absolute pinnacles of the current Clio and Mini ranges. The F1 Team R27 takes the 197 and adds even more definition to its finely chiselled handling. The Works takes the Cooper S and augments its power and torque to bursting point. Both are ordinary little hatches capable of blending into the humdrum, the banalities, the traffic snarl-ups of everyday life, yet they are also possessed of extraordinary capabilities.

OK, I admit they can't heal their own wounds, predict the future or wear worryingly attractive cheerleader outfits, but they can fly down a road so surprisingly fast that almost nothing will out-run them. So they'll bumble along for weeks on end, doing the shopping, the school runs, crawling through town centres, making do with the odd jink through a roundabout. But when the time's right, they'll stretch their legs,

MINI COOPER S WORKS  
v CLIO 197 R 27



PERFORMANCE

	MINI	CLIO
0-30	2.7	2.6
0-40	4.1	3.9
0-50	5.4	5.3
0-60	7.6	6.9
0-70	9.5	9.3
0-80	11.7	11.8
0-90	14.8	15.1
0-100	18.0	18.8

1/4 MILE

sec	15.7	15.5
mph	91	93

BRAKING

100-0	4.8sec/328.7ft	4.5sec/316.5ft
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MAX SPEED

	145mph (claimed)	134mph (claimed)
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LAP TIMES (WEST CIRCUIT)

	1:30.80	1:31.70
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MINI

CLIO

<b>Engine</b>	In-line 4-cyl, turbocharged	In-line 4-cyl
<b>Location</b>	Front, transverse	Front, transverse
<b>Displacement</b>	1598cc	1998cc
<b>Bore x stroke</b>	77.0 x 85.8mm	82.7 x 93.0mm
<b>Cylinder block</b>	Aluminium alloy	Aluminium alloy
<b>Cylinder head</b>	Aluminium alloy, dohc, four valves per cylinder, variable valve timing	Aluminium alloy, dohc, four valves per cylinder, variable valve timing
<b>Fuel and ignition</b>	Electronic engine management, direct fuel injection, single turbo	Electronic engine management, sequential multipoint injection
<b>Max power</b>	189bhp @ 6000rpm	197bhp @ 7250rpm
<b>Max torque</b>	199lb ft @ 1750rpm	159lb ft @ 5550rpm
<b>Transmission</b>	Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive, ASC+T, DSC	Six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive, TC, ESP
<b>Front suspension</b>	MacPherson struts, coil springs, gas dampers, anti-roll bar	MacPherson struts, coil springs, gas dampers, anti-roll bar
<b>Rear suspension</b>	Multi-link, coil springs, gas dampers, anti-roll bar	Torsion beam, coil springs, gas dampers, anti-roll bar
<b>Brakes</b>	294mm ventilated front discs, 259mm solid rear discs, ABS, EBD, CBC, Brake Assistant	312mm ventilated front discs, 300mm solid rear discs, ABS, EBD
<b>Wheels</b>	17in, aluminium alloy	17in, aluminium alloy
<b>Tyres</b>	205/45 R17 Dunlop SP Sport 01	215/45 R17 Continental SportContact 3
<b>Weight (kerb)</b>	1130kg	1240kg
<b>Power-to-weight</b>	170bhp/ton	161bhp/ton
<b>0-60mph</b>	7.6sec	6.9sec
<b>Max speed</b>	145mph (claimed)	134mph (claimed)
<b>Basic price</b>	£17,540 (approx - see text)	£17,250
<b>On sale</b>	Now	Now

EVO RATING ★★★★★

★★★★★

Mini's 0-60 time (above) hampered by the need for an extra gearchange.

So the 'Works' kit doesn't give a crushing advantage over the regular Cooper S, which is still mighty impressive, but if you must have the ultimate...

the satisfaction of a good lap would also be greater. And when the Mini hits a good one it's also just that bit faster.

So which superpower wins? Invisibility, undoubtedly. No, sorry that wasn't an option was it. Mini wins because it's more fun more of the time. You can see the philosophy behind the Clio - utterly focused on its ability to cover ground, purist in its high-revving naturally aspirated engine and beautiful in its functionality. You know that, given the right circumstances, it's a fantastically talented and fun thing. It's just a shame that those conditions are a tarmac special stage. In the Mini you can go into a corner at something other than the perfect speed and yet come out the other side without feeling it's a wasted opportunity. It moves around, engages and involves more than the Clio. The fact that it feels significantly faster in a straight line is an added bonus that makes nipping in and out of the everyday traffic just that bit more fun. Mini Cooper S Works: everyday Hero.



countryside, free from the humdrum for an hour or so.

Parked up back in their urban habitat, pinking as the metal cools, it's the Clio that shouts the loudest of these two, although largely due to its extreme yellowness. You have to love the touches like the vents on the back of the front arches and the exhaust pipes that sit flush within the diffuser. Pick a more sedate colour, however (saving yourself a scarcely believable £1200 in the process), and like the Mini it would be hard to tell that it had extra sparkle under the skin.

Apart from the small badges, the only telltale on the Cooper is the pair of sharp, stubby exhaust pipes with 'Works' etched into the brightwork. It's nicely subtle and, if the rest of the look isn't as motorsport-suggestive as the Clio, it nonetheless retains that unsurpassed, funky, classless appeal that makes you feel you could turn up anywhere in it.

Open the door to a Mini and you're never quite sure what you're going to find. This one has pinstripe cloth flanked by pads of brightish blue leather on the seats, topped off with chequerboard-effect trim on the dash. Combined with the mood lighting, it's all a bit Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen. It's the Clio that better understands our sort of automotive décor. Not that it tries very hard – it just has a pair of the best Recaro seats you'll find in any car.

Under its stickyback plastic, the R27 has been lowered by 7mm compared with the stock 197, while the springs have been stiffened by 27 per cent and 30 per cent front and rear respectively. The MacPherson struts also have a 10 per cent increase in bending stiffness combined with more flexible bumpstops to increase stability under braking (the awesome Brembos remain the same 312mm and 300mm respectively) and improve the steering precision. These changes all add up to the Cup chassis, soon to be a stand-alone option on all 197s. The 2-litre normally

aspirated engine is untouched: 197bhp at 7250rpm and 159lb ft at 5550.

The Works treatment closes the gap. Under the Mini's fake-scooped bonnet, power is up by 17bhp to 189bhp at 6000rpm and torque has increased by 7lb ft to 199lb ft at 1750rpm. If you add it as an option when you buy the car new, the cost for this tweakery is £1095 plus four hours' labour (about £450). It's not a lot, but then it's not a lot of an increase. And that's the only downside to the S Works – it's not a really achingly must-have improvement over the already mighty quick Cooper S. Still, if you can afford it (and given that a Mini is quickly going to see the wrong side of £18K with the minimum of options, it might not be that much of a struggle) then it's worth having, if only for the warm glow of satisfaction that you possess the ultimate in Minis.

On the subject of options, the panoramic glass sunroof (£670) is much better than the ones fitted to the first generation of new

Minis. No longer do you get the wind noise when it's closed, and the structural integrity seems unaffected this time around too.

The track is where the Clio should shine. And to some extent it does. The speed it can carry is huge and it's easier to keep the engine screaming, though if you drop out of the top register it's still frustrating. Although the chassis is more controlled, it's also less indulgent than the standard 197, which loves nothing more than a bit of lift-off oversteer. You tend to throw the R27 around up to its limits and don't bother going over them because it just doesn't seem to bring any particular rewards.

The Mini feels initially softer: a bit more understeer on turn-in, definitely more roll through the corner, but it also has more adjustability to its attitude and requires more from its driver to get the best out of it. You get the feeling that the Clio would turn in virtually identical laps pretty much all day long. The Mini would be less consistent but

# THE KNOWLEDGE

## LAP TIMES

The 1.8 miles of fast and technical tarmac that make up Bedford Autodrome's West Circuit are the *evo* benchmark. And in addition to the table on the right, we've also translated the lap times to the circuit map. In addition to the current fastest and then freeze them wherever they are when the fastest car finishes. So, as the SR3 crosses the line, the *Evo IX FQ3-340* would be grappling with Tower, the *Audi S3* would be exiting O'Rouge, and the *Ford Focus 1.6* would be just emerging from the Beckham Esses. Times in **bold** denote the current fastest in class and in **red** a new entry. (An asterisk indicates the track was damp in places.)

## SPEED TRAP

The highest speed comes just before you brake into the Pif-Paf. Generally, the higher the speed, the faster the lap time, but there are exceptions like the *Elise S*, which relies on its prowess in the corners to post a lap time beyond its straight-line capabilities.

CAR	LAP TIME	PEAK
<b>Radical SR3 1300</b>	<b>1.17.10</b>	<b>107.4</b>
Caterham R500 Evolution	1.19.00	117.0
Ariel Atom 300 S'charged	1.19.60	115.1
Caterham CSR 260 S'light	1.19.60	112.9
Dax Rush MC	1.19.70	113.0
<b>Porsche Carrera GT</b>	<b>1.19.70</b>	<b>120.5</b>
Caterham CSR 260	1.21.00	112.8
Lotus 2-Eleven	1.21.10	110.0
McLaren F1	1.21.20	120.2
Ferrari Enzo	1.21.30	120.9
Lambo Gallardo S'leggera	1.21.80	118.3
<b>Audi R8</b>	<b>1.22.10</b>	<b>113.7</b>
Koenigsegg CCX	1.22.30	120.0
Lotus Exige S	1.22.40	110.2
Lamborghini Gallardo '06	1.22.80	116.9
Mosler MT900	1.23.00	115.7
Ferrari 599 GTB	1.23.10	117.0
Ascarì KZ1	1.23.20	117.8
Porsche 997 GT3	1.23.40	114.4
Porsche 997 Turbo	1.23.55	116.5
Porsche 996 GT3 RS	1.23.85	113.4
Lamborghini Gallardo	1.23.90	112.4
Porsche 997 GT3 RS	1.24.20	113.9
Ferrari F430	1.24.20	112.2
Corvette Z06	1.24.45	118.1
<b>Mitsubishi Evo IX FQ-340</b>	<b>1.24.55</b>	<b>107.3</b>
Porsche 911 Carrera S Sport	1.24.60	108.2
TVR T350C	1.24.95	111.5
Porsche 911 (997) C4	1.25.75	106.0
Bovingdon Ring M3	1.25.85	106.0
Ferrari 612 Scaglietti	1.25.95	111.0
Porsche 911 (996) Turbo	1.26.00	112.0
Mitsubishi Evo IX FQ-320	1.26.10	107.0
Subaru Impreza STi	1.26.10	103.1
BMW M6	1.26.40	109.6
Elfin Clubsport	1.26.60	109.1

CAR	LAP TIME	PEAK
Aston Martin V8 Vantage	1.26.75	105.5
Porsche Cayman S	1.26.85	104.6
Nissan 350Z GT-S Concept	1.26.95	104.2
BMW Z4 M Coupe	1.27.10	104.9
Aston Martin Vanquish S	1.27.40	110.2
Aston Martin DB9 Manual	1.28.20	107.5
Hartge H1	1.28.20	107.5
Audi RS4	1.28.25	107.5
<b>Maserati Quattroporte</b>	<b>1.28.35</b>	<b>103.5</b>
Rage R130 Buggy	1.28.45	98.6
Roush Mustang 420RE	1.28.50	106.6
<b>Porsche Boxster S</b>	<b>1.28.55</b>	<b>101.9</b>
<b>Mercedes SLK55 AMG Black</b>	<b>1.28.60</b>	<b>107.5</b>
Lamborghini Murciélago	1.28.70*	111.5
Porsche Carrera (997)	1.28.85	109.3
<b>Nissan 350Z</b>	<b>1.29.10</b>	<b>104.4</b>
Lotus Elise 111R	1.29.20*	102.0
Mercedes SLK55 AMG	1.29.30	104.2
<b>Porsche Cayenne Turbo</b>	<b>1.29.55</b>	<b>100.9</b>
BMW M3 CS	1.29.80	103.3
BMW M5	1.29.95	108.2
<b>Mercedes SL600</b>	<b>1.29.95</b>	<b>107.5</b>
Marcos TSO GT2	1.30.00	110.3
BMW 330i M Sport	1.30.00	99.8
Mercedes SL55 AMG	1.30.05	105.9
MG SV-R	1.30.05	103.0
Mercedes ML63 AMG	1.30.05	99.2
Alpina B5	1.30.10	102.5
Mercedes C55 AMG	1.30.11	104.9
Lotus Elise S	1.30.20	92.9
<b>Audi S3</b>	<b>1.30.40</b>	<b>104.1</b>
Ford Mustang GT	1.30.55	102.5
Lotus Europa	1.30.70	102.1
BMW Z4 3.0si Coupe	1.30.80	101.8
Mitsubishi Evo 260	1.31.05*	99.7
Mazda 3 MPS	1.31.30	101.1

CAR	LAP TIME	PEAK
Vauxhall Vectra VXR	1.31.55	96.4
Cadillac CTS-V	1.31.65	96.4
BMW 130i M Sport	1.31.70	102.7
Mercedes S65 AMG	1.31.70	107.0
Jaguar XK	1.31.75	101.6
Bentley Continental GT	1.32.25	102.5
VW Golf R32	1.32.55	99.7
Mazda RX8	1.32.70	94.8
Dodge Ram SRT-10	1.32.80	104.3
Vauxhall Clio 182 Cup	1.33.10	95.8
Renault Astra VXR	1.33.15	95.4
Renault Megane Trophy	1.33.35	97.9
Vauxhall Monaro VXR	1.33.55*	100.8
Seat Leon Cupra R	1.33.55	97.3
Vauxhall Astra VXR	1.33.65*	99.5
VW Golf GTI Mk5	1.33.75	97.4
Renault Clio Trophy	1.33.75	97.0
Ford Focus ST	1.33.90	98.8
Chrysler 300C Hemi	1.34.60	100.5
Mini Cooper S	1.34.60	94.3
Alfa GT V6	1.35.20	99.9
VW Polo GT	1.35.30	91.3
Mercedes CLS 55 AMG	1.35.50*	100.3
Alfa Brera Q4 V6	1.35.90	95.3
Renault Mégane R26	1.36.05*	95.6
MG ZT 260	1.36.05	97.0
Ford Fiesta ST	1.36.15	87.5
Vauxhall Astra 200	1.36.20	93.5
Citroën C2 VTS	1.36.25	83.4
Seat Ibiza FR	1.37.45	88.5
BMW 120i	1.38.25	89.8
Seat Leon FR	1.40.00*	82.7
Westfield XI	1.40.66	82.6
Honda Civic Type-R	1.41.45*	90.2
Ford Focus (mk2) 1.6	1.43.50	84.1

\* track damp in places



PEAK SPEED



PIF-PAF

**Bedford**  
**AUTODROME**

THE  
WEST  
CIRCUIT

BANK  
COMPLEX

BECKHAM  
ESSES