

Sensible power output makes the DBA Mini eMastered a huge amount of fun

Enlarge / David Brown Automotive makes modernized minis with electric power for well-heeled buyers.

David Brown Automotive

reader comments

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Have you ever thought: “I wonder what a \$150,000 classic Mini would be like?” If so, you’re in luck, because David Brown Automotive (DBA) has just the car for you: the Mini eMastered. It’s a classic Mini, powered by electricity, and it costs a lot of money.

You’ll be forgiven for not knowing who David Brown Automotive is. It’s a small outfit that specializes in cars for the ultra wealthy, but it does so rather wonderfully. Founded in 2013 by a chap called, perhaps unsurprisingly, David Brown (no relation to the Aston Martin David Brown, before you ask), its first car was the Jaguar XK Convertible-based Speedback GT.

Launched in 2014, the Speedback GT came with a 5.0 L supercharged V8, more than 500 hp (373 kW), and a look that apes a classic Aston Martin. Brown, an avid classic car enthusiast, loved the look of his classics but hated having to fix them all the time, so he made something that looks old but shouldn’t break down anywhere near as often. The company says no more than 100 will be built, and with a pretty spicy entry fee one can imagine the wider appeal may be a smidge limited.

Enlarge / The original mini is right-sized for cities.

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The firm's next endeavour was the Mini Remastered. More of a value proposition (though these things are relative), the Mini is a more traditional restomod. A donor car is sought out, its engine and gearbox are given a complete overhaul, and a new body is brought in. The body is de-seamed, rust proofed, and given a suitably retro aesthetic before being painted, perfectly, in any shade the customer chooses. The interior is clad in the finest peeled cow, too, and drivers get mod cons like air conditioning, central locking, and even Apple CarPlay. DBA even adds power steering.

There have been a few special versions of the Mini Remastered—the music-centric Marshall edition (that looks a bit like a Marshall speaker), and the race-bred Oselli

Edition.

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All of those are powered by combustion engines, and DBA's clients are increasingly keen to get their Mini kicks in something a little greener. 2023 saw the launch of the Mini eMastered, a quieter, more environmentally conscious take on DBA's signature hatch.

Enlarge / Unlike some other Mini EV conversions, the DBA Mini eMastered does not have tire-shredding amounts of power, but it's all the better for that.

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In place of the (let's face it... awful) A Series engine is a 98 hp (73 kW), 129 lb-ft (174 Nm) Zonic 70 motor hooked up to an 18.8 kWh battery. The car weighs just 1,367 lbs (620 kg),

which in car terms is basically nothing and puts it on par with the '50s classic. DBA says it'll sprint from 0-62mph (0-100 km/h) in 8.5 seconds and go up to a rather brisk 92 mph (148 km/h).

Not only is that 0-62 run quicker than Alec Issigonis' classic, it's almost as quick as a BMW Mini Cooper. Range is pegged at 110 miles (177 km), while recharge times sit at up to three hours—there's no mega-fast charging here. Let's face it; if you're dropping \$150,000 on a tiny electric restomod, chances are you'll have a spare car kicking around to use while the Mini's recharging.

When it's not plugged in, you'll have an obscene amount of fun in it. The first thing you'll notice is that it's so freaking small. DBA's fitted sweet little bullet mirrors give a rear view, but in reality you only need to glance over your shoulder to get a full view of what's going on behind you. As it's an old car, there's LOTS of glass to look through, too. The power is delivered instantly; you'll fly down the street, zipping to the speed limit with ease. It's grin-inducingly quick.

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DBA's power steering doesn't turn the wheel into a loose disc, and you can tell there's some help there, but you still feel very much part of the process—corners are a giggle, no matter the angle. The fun handling of old-school Minis is still there, and you can properly hoof it around bends if you're in the mood (and you will be). As it's so light, the suspension is barely troubled by lumps and bumps, too. You can't help but smile as you go about your business.

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It's not all smiles and light, though. As the steering column and pedals are in their original places, if you've got long legs, you'll find you need to be cautious of where you put your feet in case of accidental pedal presses, and your knees might end up at odd angles around the steering wheel, but that

has always been true of a Mini.

You won't be the only one pleased to be in its presence, as everyone who sees it will throw a wry grin your way. Or they'll ask questions—largely about the lack of noise, but also whether you built it yourself.

- 18.8 kWh of lithium-ion lives up front.

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- The Mini eMastered interior is built to a very high level.

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- Back seats don't have any more leg room than in the 1960s.

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- The bits you touch feel great.

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- Classic mini, classic mews.

David Brown Automotive

Despite its size, it feels pretty spacious—modern cars and their chunky crash structures can feel cramped, but the Mini seems sensibly packaged. I wouldn't fancy being in the back for a long stretch, though. The work done to the interior needs to be applauded. The leatherwork is exquisite. The seats are at the perfect point between comfy and slightly bouncy, too. Every panel inside is beautifully finished, as is the switchgear—all metal, all pleasing to play with. Its sound system is punchy, too, but doesn't drown out its motor's pleasing electric whirr. DBA's exterior treatment is just right as well—a mix of classic, with hints of modern thanks to LED lights. You can see where the money goes.

The price will be a sticking point for plenty of people. \$150,000 is a lot of money for most people. Life-changing, in fact. For the buyers DBA's looking at, it's not. DBA's jam is to make cars that suit its clients. They don't need a new,

shiny restomod to do huge road trips; they want a car to buzz about the city in, to nip to the shops in, or to pop over to a mate's place in.

It's here that the point of the Mini eMastered rears its head. It's a useful novelty, a jacket to throw on for a night out. There's no practical need for something like this, just as there's no need for a McLaren, Ferrari, or any of that ilk. Its job is to be brilliant at being a luxurious electric restomod. And it's very good at that indeed.

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