

## ON THE ROAD

## A Mini marvel

ON A HIGH Minis gather on the former Fiat factory rooftop test track used in the iconic movie



## Fans of The Italian Job can now relive the experience

**ALWAYS wanted to star in a remake of The Italian Job, except without ending up in a coach hanging off a cliff?**

Well now's your chance, because I'm just back from a charity run of the same name which, since it started in 1990 with 56 teams driving everything from Minis to Lamborghinis from the UK to Rome and back, has raised £2.4 million for children's charities.

Even from the start it was a hoot, as I arrived in Rome to find 25 Minis old and new ready to go, among them the immaculate 20-year-old red model of Londoners Bill and Linda Handley.

"This is our ninth time, and at first we thought it was just going to be a bunch of Mini nerds," said Bill, "but they're actually the nicest people on earth." And Bill turned out to be a remarkable character: an ex-undercover cop turned corporate events organiser who, as well as the Mini, owned a Range Rover, a powder blue Rolls-Royce and a yacht.

Having said that, I did overhear the occasional nerdy conversation: "Here, is that paint finish vermilion or cinnabar?"

"I think you'll find it's 1275 GT Red, my son."

As for me, I was in a brand new

Mini Cooper D, which was not only a treat to drive from the word go, with a silky clutch, six-speed gearbox and punchy acceleration, but the funky interior was a nice place to be too. You could easily mistake it for a petrol, it was that smooth.

It was very economical too, averaging 62 mpg.

And so, we were off, driving in convoy past the Colosseum and the Vatican with a police escort as happy Italians laughed and waved back. Maybe they're just like that all the time, but either way, it was like being at the Pope's wedding.

The next morning, I set off armed with a road book similar to the ones used by rally drivers to show where to go at each junction.

Being a bloke, I used the alternative Follow the Mini in Front method, which worked well until it took a wrong turning, as a result of which I got lost 4,589 times on the way to Ostia, the site of the second largest and best preserved Roman town in Italy after Pompeii.

Wondering vaguely why the Romans only ever built ruins, I then crowned that performance by getting lost again on the one-mile journey to lunch, earning a hearty



REGULARS Bill and Linda on their ninth trip



ICONIC The famous Italian Job car chase

round of applause from the gathered throng when I finally arrived.

By some miracle I found our way to the hotel, only to find another challenge awaiting in the car park.

"See those five paper cups?" said trip organiser Freddie St George. "You have 30 seconds to crush them."

"I can do it in five," I said. "Cups, you look terrible and I hate you."

"Good work," said Freddie. "They look crushed all right."

He has good reasons to like the event - after his Italian mum Giulia

started the runs, he met both his wife and best man on them.

And so for the next few days we all drove around the glorious countryside, enjoying the holy trinity of good food, good wine and good company as we visited ancient castles, wineries and villages, including the stunning mountaintop citadel of Bagnoregio.

Best of all, though, was a track day at the Vallelunga circuit, including some brilliant skid pan fun where a moving pad kicked the rear end sideways requiring you to try and keep the car straight on full lock.

The trip finished with another hilarious, hooting convoy around all the movie's locations in Turin, like the former Queen's Palace where they planned the heist, and the car chase spots such as the church steps, rooftop test track of the former Fiat factory, velodrome and weir.

By that stage, I'd improved enough in my timekeeping and navigation to move up from 21st to 13th in the rankings. But, more importantly, I finished joint first with everyone else in the enjoyment stakes.

■ **The Italian Job costs £1,200 per person for 10 days full board, including all events and five days unlimited wine. For details of the 2016 event and to register, visit [www.italianjob.com](http://www.italianjob.com)**

## IT'S DS4 AT THE DOUBLE

We're meant to call them just DSs - but until everyone knows about Citroen's new DS Automobiles brand it'll be confusing to call the models by only their new names. The latest to come from DS Automobiles are the DS4 - a straightforward hatchback - and DS4 Crossback, a sort of crossover with extra ride height and different styling.

Both are on sale now with the normal DS4 kicking off at £19,495 and the Crossback at £21,745. We've driven both and will have a road test for you in the next few weeks.



➤ **Sales of Ford's Focus ST have risen 270% since the diesel versions of the hot hatch were launched earlier this year.**

**Powered by a 185bhp Duratorq motor, the diesels made up 45% of ST sales.**

**From next year the diesel Focus ST will be available with a six-speed dual clutch 'PowerShift' gearbox that will drop the car's 0-62mph down to 7.7sec.**

## ALL GO FOR TURISMO

SsangYong's Turismo MPV has been given a serious update with a new 2.2-litre Euro6 compliant diesel engine and a Mercedes-Benz sourced 7-speed automatic gearbox. The Turismo is a big old machine that seats seven. Pretty it ain't, but with prices starting at £18,995 it's very good value.

There's even a version with four-wheel drive which, at £24,995, has virtually no rivals.



## ON YOUR BIKE

**X FACTOR**  
Ducati's X Diavel wowed Milan



**THRILLS**  
Lots of riding

## HOT NEW RIDES REV UP AT NEC

BY GEOFF HILL

There is only one place for anyone interested in motorcycles to be from this weekend.

With 30 manufacturers showcasing more than 50 new models for 2016, plus plenty of live action and interactive features, Motorcycle Live will run at full revs for nine days from Saturday.

The UK's biggest bike show at Birmingham's NEC will display all the top brands' new offerings recently unveiled for the international press and public at the Eicma show in Milan.

Ducati will be showing off its 959 Panigale which proved to be a big draw with the partisan Italian crowd in Milan and is sure to be just as popular with the Brit audience. It features an all-new 955cc Superquadro motor, new fairings and all manner of electronic wizardry.

There are also two new Multistrada 1200s - the aggressively off-road capable Enduro and the Pikes Peak. And there's a cruiser in the shape of the XDiavel, with a new 1262cc V-twin engine.

On the Suzuki stand, the sixth-generation GSX-R1000 will cause a buzz.

The latest version of this ever-popular superbike features a new 999cc VVT engine making 200bhp, a new aluminium chassis, Showa fork, 10-mode traction control and a quickshifter/autoblipper.

From KTM comes a sports-tourer version of the popular 1290 Super Duke - the 1290 Super Duke GT. Its retuned V-twin makes 173bhp and it has got a huge 23-litre fuel tank, stronger subframe for panniers, new fairing and adjustable screen, plus LED cornering lights.

Other new bike highlights to look out for include Yamaha's YZF-R1 derived 998cc MT-10 super-naked, and a flat track MT-09, the 847cc XSR900.

From Triumph, there are six new versions of the very popular Tiger Explorer range, and from Kawasaki there's a special Winter Edition of its awesome new 200bhp ZX-10R. On the BMW stand, the new stripped-back beefy looking R nineT Scrambler will be the main talking point.

The spectacular manufacturer stands will be surrounded by an enormous variety of live entertainment, interactive features and a range of opportunities to ride for experienced motorcyclists, complete novices and kids.

There'll be the usual opportunities to celeb-spot as a whole host of racing and other stars pay a visit to the show. New for this year is FMX Live presented by Arenacross. Visitors will be able to watch some of the world's leading freestyle motocross riders whip and back-flip in a jaw-dropping display of aerial gymnastics.

Motorcycle Live takes place from November 28 to December 6.

■ **For tickets and further info, call 0844 581 2345 or visit [motorcyclelive.co.uk](http://motorcyclelive.co.uk).**

