

# Forge

MOTORSPORT

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modern **MINI**



**MODDING**



# Forging Ahead

With a tight deadline, the race was on to build the UK's first modified Countryman. *MM* was holding the stopwatch...









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**B**eing a tuning firm can be hard work as anyone in the business of making MINIs go faster will know. But being the firm which supplies the tuning parts to the tuning firms can be even harder, especially when a new model arrives on the scene and every indication is that it will be one of the year's hot sellers.

Gloucester-based Forge Motorsport has been in the business of designing and fabricating motorsport and fast road parts for years and basically if it can be made from metal then Forge will be able to produce it for you. The firm has become popular in the MINI world more recently too, especially for its intercoolers which are a favourite upgrade to the R56 models as they need no hacking about of the car's bodywork and offer big performance gains.

In this game it pays to be on the ball which explains why, back when the Countryman was a dot on the horizon, the guys at Forge strolled round to their local MINI dealer, Cotswold of Gloucester and ordered up a brand new Countryman Cooper S ALL4. The idea was to get their hands on the car in early December, wheel it straight into the workshop and get busy with the measuring and prototyping in order to have a full set of performance upgrades ready for the Autosport show at the NEC in January.

In this respect they were right on the money: having driven the Countryman S last issue, we discovered that although it shares the same 184 bhp turbo 1600 motor as the Cooper S hatch, the extra weight, length and general bulk of the bigger car does blunt its performance noticeably. Where a standard Cooper S hatch feels like a properly quick car, the



## Work in progress



Countryman's front end offers more space than the MINI hatch for the intercooler.



Replacement front bumper is part of the Countryman styling kit and is supplied separately.



The styling kit includes a pair of chunky sill covers, seem here fresh from the paintshop.





Left: Engine spec includes uprated induction, Forge blow-off valve and silicone hose kit. And not forgetting the trademark alloy header tank.

Right: Graphics transform the car – as you may have noticed from the ‘work in progress’ shots, it started life in black...



Countryman feels only reasonably brisk and has to be worked hard to get the most of the performance, while there's (as yet) no JCW option on the menu to give it an added boost.

All of which means that the usual recipe of improved induction, better intercooling and some general attention to increasing the power output should create something along the lines of the missing Countryman JCW and give the maxi-MINI the pace to feel more like a Cooper S hatch.

That was the plan anyway but the freak weather conditions in December well and truly put the boot into the timetable, with

the car not arriving until several weeks after the original delivery estimate. The Countryman of course is put together in Graz, Austria rather than here in the UK at Cowley and the heavy snow disrupted deliveries to the point that ALL4 or not, the car didn't make it to Forge until just after Christmas. "We've seen a photo of



Big brakes or big wheels? That was just one decision which had to be made.



With enough engineering talent on hand it's amazing what you can achieve with a deadline looming.



Prototyping the strut brace showed just how much wider the Countryman is than the hatch.





it in a compound..." was Sales Manager Alex Harry's rather disappointed response when we called to check on progress one day as the holiday period loomed.

With the Countryman set to be the centrepiece of Forge's stand at the Autosport show on January 12, the minute the car arrived at the dealer it was driven into the workshop and all hands were immediately on deck.

One thing the Countryman S lacks in standard form is much visual presence but MINI does offer an optional styling kit which is similar in its effect to the JCW bodykit on the hatch, with chunky sill covers and deeper front and rear bumpers giving it a whole new appearance. Fortunately, the guys at Forge had thought ahead and ordered the kit – which is a dealer-fit item rather than a production line fitment – and had already sent it to the bodyshop so that when the car finally arrived it simply needed bolting up. The bumpers are relatively easy, but as we discovered while we were photographing the progress, the sill covers take a bit more work: a lot of existing trim and fiddly plastic clips have to be removed in order to get the standard parts off.

With the standard bumper off though, it did give space for the updated intercooler to be designed and if you thought that it would simply be a case of fitting Cooper S parts then you'd be surprised: the hatch

*Above: Forge intercooler fits without bodywork alterations.*

*Top left: 19-inch JCW rims allowed clearance for the big brakes.*

*Top: Scorpion pipe fills the rear valance better than the standard Cooper S pipework.*

and the Countryman may use the same engine, but the bodysells are completely different, especially at the front end. Luckily this presents an opportunity rather than a problem, as the Countryman's bulbous front end allows more space behind the bumper which in turn means a bigger intercooler can be fitted. After much R&D work, the finished unit is a stepped design which offers a noticeably bigger cooling area than the Cooper S unit, with all the potential performance benefits too.







## Tech Spec

**MODEL:** MINI Countryman Cooper S ALL4

**YEAR:** 2010

**ENGINE:** Cooper S 1.6 turbo with Forge Motorsport prototype parts including induction kit, silicon hose kit, larger intercooler and blow-off valve

**GEARBOX:** Six speed manual with ALL4 four-wheel drive

**SUSPENSION MODS:** Forge upper front strut brace

**BRAKE MODS:** 360 mm grooved discs and Forge Motorsport calipers

**WHEELS AND TYRES:** 19 inch JCW wheels with 225/40 Pirelli PZero tyres

**INTERIOR:** Standard

**EXTERIOR:** Countryman Aerokit, vinyl wrap in red

## Contact

**FORGE MOTORSPORT**

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**“... One thing the Countryman S lacks in standard form is much visual presence but MINI does offer an optional styling kit which is similar in its effect to the JCW kit...”**

While they were working on the engine, Forge also fitted one of its blow-off valves, along with an induction kit, a silicone hose kit and a short-shift kit for the gear linkage. It wouldn't be a Forge demo car without an alloy tank somewhere and sure enough, the plastic header tank has been ditched in favour of a neat alloy unit which gives the engine bay a nice motorsport feel.

The beefy rear bumper also made the standard-issue tailpipes look rather lost, so a Scorpion stainless item was bolted up and fills the bigger apertures nicely as well as offering a useful performance benefit.

Nobody yet makes a suspension kit for the Countryman and even for a firm with the resources of Forge, making up a complete kit of springs and dampers in just a few days is pushing things a bit, so for now the car still sits on its standard kit, with an upper strut brace stiffening up the front end. We watched them prototyping this part and the process showed just how much wider the Countryman is than the MINI hatch.

By now the pressure was really on, with the transporter booked to take the car to the NEC in just a few days' time. The

engine work was complete, the bodykit was fitted up but the beefy 360 mm brakes were still sat on the bench. Why? Well the Countryman S comes as standard with 17-inch wheels and there's just no way discs that large will fit underneath 17s. Simple, you might think: just one call to anyone in the MINI world will secure a set of 18s and the problem is solved. Not so – the Countryman uses five-stud hubs with the offset and PCD of BMW's 1-Series and the MINI JCW so the wheels need to



be chosen carefully. At one point it looked as if the car would either be displayed with the big brakes and no wheels, or with the wheels and no big brakes. The general agreement was however that this would be rather too lame for anyone to live with, so being a resourceful bunch, they phoned around locally and with just hours to go, sourced a set of suitable 19-inch JCW wheels which were duly wrapped in 225/40 Pirelli Pzeros and bolted up.

No sooner had the last wheel bolt been torqued up than the man from the graphics firm was knocking at the door and at close of play the day before the car was due to be on the transporter, he was finished. And a striking job he's made of it too, with the black Countryman now being largely red and featuring Forge's signature chequered treatment.

Fast forward just a few hours and 7.30 the next morning saw *MM* getting busy with the cameras, the transporter arriving on the dot at 10 am as scheduled. With the shots in the bag, it was winched onboard and trundled off to Birmingham where many readers will have seen it taking a deserved rest for a few days under the show lights.

And there you have it: if the only thing that's put you off so far is the lack of sparkling performance then thanks to some hard work and talented engineering, there's now no reason for you to go off and buy that Qashqai... ■