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## Vehicle Details: The MINI Stick Shift

### Rediscover the joy of shifting.

So, you read the auto news today, oh, boy, and found that manual transmissions were – what’s this – fading away? That may be true at brands like Ferrari and Porsche, but not MINI. Those who revel in the joy of expertly shifting their own gears, using an actual clutch pedal, can revel in such joy in every model MINI offers for 2012.



Has it come to this? *Car & Driver* magazine editor Eddie Alterman, so upset at the decline of manual transmission choices, launched a “Save the Manuals” campaign. “Even sports car stalwart Ferrari, of gated-shifter fame, isn’t providing a three-pedal option on the new 458 Italia,” lamented Alterman. He’ll be happy to know, however, that all MINI models, including the new 2012 MINI coupe, still come stick shift-equipped for those who want it.

There’s nothing wrong with driving an automatic sporty car; rest assured that if you choose an automatic in your MINI, you’ll surely enjoy driving the car. MINI models offer a super-smooth six-speed automatic that you can shift manually when desired including with steering wheel paddleshifters on “S” models. In addition, MINI cars are so efficient that you get nearly the same EPA-rated fuel economy with either the manual or automatic transmissions.



Many driving enthusiasts, however, believe that the best way to enjoy a car geared for sporty driving is to immerse themselves in its gears with a manual transmission. With a well-engineered stick shift, you can have more fun keeping the engine in its power band sweet spot, shifting gears when engine revs on the tachometer tell you or even trusting your ears and “feel” of the car.

Now, to be fair to people who shun manuals, there are some reasonable explanations for the way they feel. Young drivers might not even know manual transmissions exist because they’ve never seen one in their parents’ cars. They may have never heard terms like “pop the clutch,” and they’re way, way too young to remember when a car with “four on the floor” was a lot cooler than one with “three on the tree.” Also, car video games don’t generally require working a clutch and shifter.

Plus, lots of people hate that “rollback” that happens with some stick shift cars when pulling away from a stop on an incline. MINI has a solution for that called Hill Assist. This nifty feature holds the car for two seconds while you coordinate clutch and shifter to move off.

That makes a MINI stick shift practical; here's what makes it extra-fun: First, most car enthusiasts will agree that the joy of driving a stick shift car depends largely on whether the rest of the car is also designed for fun. A manual transmission in a ho-hum car might seem more like work than pleasure.

MINI, of course, has engineered every one of its cars for driving enjoyment. From the Cooper Hardtop up to the John Cooper Works turbo tarmac demons, MINI cars spell F-U-N. Fortified with high-strength structures, sophisticated four-wheel independent suspensions, rev-happy, responsive and powerful engines and advanced dynamic handling systems, they're all ready to pounce on the road. A MINI simply gives you a better feel for the road and a more direct connection to driving than most of what passes for "sporty" out there.

All that would be for naught if the MINI did not come with a gearbox (as the Brits like to call a transmission) that was up to snuff. The MINI six-speed manual is one sophisticated and smooth piece of equipment. It comes from Getrag, the same folks who also supply MINI parent, BMW. The MINI six-speed uses a "dual layshaft design," which is a fancy way of saying it's a compact, light unit. Dual-cone synchronizers ensure smooth shifts and durability. The clutch offers smooth take-up and engagement, and it's self-adjusting, so it always feels right.

You don't need to know all the technical bits to get the point though. Just come in and test-drive a 2012 stick shift MINI and rediscover the joy of shifting.

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