



## A wolf in sheep's clothing

**The original Mini has been brought back to life – as the Meanie! But the British cult classic exhibits all the hallmarks of a full-blooded sports car. And what's more, it comes with Swiss credentials.**

There it stands in all its innocence, the original Mini, looking as if butter wouldn't melt in its mouth. But appearances can be deceptive, because there's a big heart beating in this little bundle of joy: a powerful two-litre mid-mounted turbo engine made in Wolfsburg that packs a mean 220 HP on the rear axle. It enables this particular baby to sprint from 0 to 100 km/h in less than four seconds, while the speedometer needle doesn't stop till it's hovering at an electronically limited top speed of 200 km/h. It's a mean machine that lives up to its new name and is powerful enough to give a fully fledged sports car a run for its money. The Meanie's bodywork, in *British Racing Green*, is yet another clue that this diminutive set of wheels is destined for greater things.

The Meanie's history reads like a fairy-tale: Once upon a time, in 2012, mechanical engineering student Raffael Heierli was writing his bachelor's thesis at the University of Applied Sciences in Rapperswil. Its title was "Structural analysis for the design of a mid-engine sports car with a classic car look, licensable for road use and suitable for small-scale production". His vehicle of choice was a late 1990s-model classic Mini. The examiners were duly impressed and the author was awarded his degree in mechanical engineering.

But there was a catch, because the car existed only on paper. So Raffael Heierli looked to Walter Frey for help. And the entrepreneur was very receptive to the project – after all, his Emil Frey Group had imported the original Mini for decades, and Walter himself had raced the Mini Cooper S in the past.

Teaming up with fellow students Marc Bernhard and Adrian Spindler, Heierli got down to work in a backyard workshop. The new/old body-in-white was purchased from British Motor Heritage. From the outside, the Meanie would be indistinguishable from the original, but under the body would hide another – modern – car. Engine, transmission, tubular frame, brakes, cooling system, exhaust system and two bucket seats with racing harnesses were specially developed or sourced from around the world.

Some 17 weeks and around a thousand working hours later, the prototype was on its wheels and ready to hit the road, as a two-seater with no boot. An extensive testing programme began and the car was put through its paces on motorways, the race track, mountain passes and in stop-and-go city traffic. The 847 kg featherweight showed no signs of weakness and its road-handling capabilities kept the car's unbridled power under control where necessary.

The last major step for Raffael Heierli was to obtain the EU Small Series Type Approval, which would mean that it was also licensed for use on European roads. To get the car manufactured he joined forces with the two highly specialised Emil Frey Group companies in Safenwil, Emil Frey Classics AG and Roos Engineering Ltd.



Eighteen months of hard work followed, during which Heierli had to wade through 17,000 pages of regulations. He produced a hefty pile of documents describing the Meanie and its production process down to the smallest detail. This necessitated a large number of tests, some of which were conducted by independent German testing laboratory Fakt. For the crash test, for example, a demolition-ready Mini was made to weigh the same as the Meanie and then driven against a wall. More elaborate tests on electromagnetic compatibility and evaporative emissions were also necessary. And obviously, the Meanie had to satisfy all the latest exhaust gas, noise and safety regulations.

Following various improvements, the desired outcome was finally achieved. In the autumn of 2016 the proud Meanie creators obtained both the road licence for the EU – which automatically applies to Switzerland as well – and approval for small series production of up to a thousand vehicles a year. This does not mean, however, that Switzerland is going to be getting its very own automobile industry. High material costs, elaborate design and a lot of manual labour mean that the Meanie could not be built profitably in Switzerland, so production will cease after five cars. “We are still going to fit out the ‘production vehicles’ in elegant British style, e.g. with leather and Alcantara”, Raffael Heierli promises.

Thanks to ambitious students and the expertise of the Emil Frey Group, it has been demonstrated that we are capable of building a car in Switzerland that complies with all the regulations for new vehicles. Moreover, a nice side effect is that the five future Meanie owners will be able to count themselves as members of an exclusive club. For more information please see: [www.meanie.ch](http://www.meanie.ch)

**For more information about Emil Frey Classics AG:**

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