



Great Ocean Road BIG MINI DRIVE 25 April – 3 May, 2008

The Plan

Each year clubMINI NSW/ACT conducts a BIG MINI drive. This is our opportunity to get out on the highway and get our motors running, sounds like a great song line. But it is truly the highlight of the annual calendar of events. In past year's we have completed three High Country drives through Victoria, a fabulous 14 day run around Tasmania and this year we turned our focus to the Great Ocean Road (GOR) on the southern shores of Victoria.



The twelve,,,, I mean 4? Apostles

But the GOR is a long way from home and whilst you can get there in a loooong day's drive from Sydney down the boring Hume Hwy we chose a far more scenic and twisty route. It was decided to run the BIG MINI drive during the autumn festival period for both Tumut and Bright. The countryside in the Mountains at this time of the year is a riot of colour and makes for fabulous touring. The route would take us via Tumut for the Festival of the Falling

Leaf, then over the Mountains via Tumbarumba and Corryong to beautiful Bright. From Bright we had a taste of that boring Hume as we bypassed Melbourne to Geelong and Lorne. Then along the GOR to Port Campbell before heading north to the Grampians and Halls Gap. Our return trip would take us via Echuca and the Murray Valley Hwy and the Alpine Way to Cooma and then home via Bungendore.



Autumn is a great time to travel, the trees drop all their leaves and if you are really lucky the occasional Red MINI.

Those who have read the newsletter on the Festival of the Falling Leaf Drive will know that our BIG MINI drive started with the first two days of that great trip so let me take up the story from Day 3, Sunday 27 April.

Tumut to Bright

As mentioned in the Festival story the rain started on Saturday night just as the fireworks concluded. Light rain fell through the night and Sunday's forecast

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was indeed foreboding. Snow down to 900 metres, hail and a sheep grazier's alert. We were soon to learn that a sheep grazier's alert meant those of us with heated seats would be envied by those without.

A quick stop to purchase apples from the apple producing centre of Australia (Batlow, just look at the sticker on your apples in your lunch box) followed by a visit to a recently opened art gallery in chilly Tumbarumba. The skies were black and light drizzle fell, the temp gauges hovered around 8 degrees and stayed there all day, we even thought for a moment they were all stuck on the same temp.

The wet and greasy road conditions combined with double long weekend demerit points and a zero tolerance factor in Victoria meant we were well behaved. We had 7 MINI's and Ged's new Megane which we christened Serena because of its big rear end (Yes, I know, hardly fair to Mr Renault). Our 7 MINI's included the new clubman supplied by MINI Australia as our support vehicle carrying spare tyres for us just in case, and ably driven by our ever faithful Wayne who has supported us in all our BIG MINI drives, so much so we have decided to make him an honorary member of the club. Welcome Wayne and his lovely wife Belinda.

Wayne & Belinda welcome to clubMINI



Despite the misty rain, the country side still looked great with its splashes of yellow and orange. The threat of snow was continually broadcast and we expected to see some white stuff. We were slightly rewarded as we approach the town of Mt Beauty when we spotted a 4WD going in the opposite direction with its bonnet covered in snow. It had obviously just come down from the snow fields of Falls Creek.

Passing over Tawonga Gap there was no snow but plenty of mist and slippery roads. We had to explain to Wayne that the orange triangle that kept flashing on his speedo meant he should Liftum Foot.

The sight of 7 MINI's on the road always is awe inspiring and judging by the look on the faces of passing motorist our MINI convoy was having no less of an effect. It was during this day that my wife, Julie, suggested that my newly invented MINI wave was not perhaps the most endearing thing she had seen nor should I use it on Bikies crowded around hotels as we passed.



This is not how you do the MINI Wave

The MINI wave is easy to demonstrate but hard to describe, needless to say I'll give it a go. Please follow these instructions as you read. Extend your right arm directly in front of you and at 90 degrees to your shoulder. Turn your right hand up so the wrist forms a 90 degree angle to your arm. Spread your

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fingers on your right hand to make a fan shape. Now, vigorously move your hand from left to right without changing the angle of your arm to your body. Do this for say 10 seconds and you have the MINI wave. Try it in front of a mirror to make sure you have it right, if you look like a dork, you are almost there. Now go out and try it in the real world, preferably with a bunch of bikies at a Pub. I bet they wave back (even if they only use one finger – no doubt reducing their carbon foot print).

Anyway, the MINI Wave took off and we soon had everyone on the Drive giving the MINI Wave!

Another phenomenon of MINI drives is the propensity for MINI owners to capture their MINI in all sorts of locations in a photographic record. To avoid embarrassment for some of the things that we do to try to capture the most original photo, we decided to hold a photographic competition over the duration of the BIG MINI drive. So everyone had an excuse to take a zillion photos of their MINI and the surrounding countryside. This started with a combined effort in a park in Tumbarumba. The trees were all changing colour, and had carpeted the grass in an array of yellows, orange and brown. I suggested we randomly park around the park to get a MINI photo. This turned out to be a great suggestion as anyone will know if you try to organise 7 MINI's for a photo it can become quite a long and drawn out process. The random thing worked really good as we just parked where we wished, Although Steve was heard to utter that no-one could see his MINI, so?



Can anyone see Steve's MINI, no? No drama!

There was one more highlight for today, on arriving at Bright, the girls, Belinda, Heather and Julie decided sitting in a MINI all day and eating lots of cakes and pastries when we did stop was doing nothing for their bodies, so they decided to take a walk through the leafy streets of Bright. Merv and I thought we should keep an eye on them just in case they wavered into any shops along the way. Well, the girls set a cracking pace and Merv and I were soon left behind to seek out where they had disappeared to. After about 30 mins and believing we were about to reach the Pacific Ocean, we gave up and turned back. Suffice to say, Merv and I were pretty quiet for the rest of the night, exhausted!

Bright to Lorne

The weather was partially cloudy with some sun, the temp made it all the way to 12 degrees. The road to Geelong was the usual boring Highway stuff, although we did stop off at Glenrowan and experienced a bit of Ned Kelly junk in the shops. We had pre-arranged to meet up with Beverley from clubMINI Victoria who had joined us last year on the Tassie Tour, but first we stopped off at Avalon airport to collect the other half of Ros, Raoul, who had to work over the weekend. We also met Ian and Colleen also from clubMINI VIC and who had also been with us in Tassie. Beverley

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escorted us to the beachside at Geelong for a late lunch. It was a beautiful setting surrounded by unusual giant people (Sculptures I am told, I was particularly taken by the 8 foot high female life saver!)

You need to understand that I was trying to protect



this young lady from the camera toting tourists that were nearby.

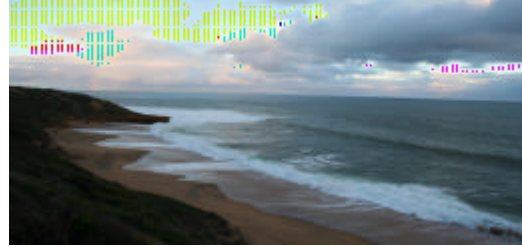
After lunch we continued to Torquay where we visited the Surf Museum, and managed to gain entry at half price after convincing the ticket seller we were school kids on an educational tour, true! Here, we were joined by Beverley's other half, Steven. So we now had 9 MINI's



Ged decided to give the lifesavers a hand, shame he was a little short.

Then, as the sun set we stopped off at the famous Bells Beach for more photos and as dark fell we passed under the Great Ocean Road archway and headed into Lorne. As we pulled up at our overnight accommodation I was a little confused

(Some say that is normal), our numbers had grown to 10 MINI's.



The famous Bell's Beach

It seemed that in the darkness of night as we drove through Lorne, another MINI was going in the opposite direction, they became so excited to see so many MINI's they turned around and followed us. It turned out they were a lovely young couple who were new owners of an R56 MINI from Geelong. They joined us for dinner and spent many hours with the MINI people and of course exchanged contact details with our Victorian counterparts for future drives together.

Lorne to Port Campbell

Having arrived at our overnight accommodation in the dark, we were all a little surprised to wake the next morning to see that each room commanded a spectacular view across the water and out to sea. I even spotted some dolphins or were they seals? Feeding on a shoal of fish close to the rocks immediately below our room.



Now that's what I call an aerial!

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We retraced to the start of the GOR to get photos of the archway and also decided to get another MINI photo in front of the Lighthouse despite the fact that vehicle entry was denied, we got away with it.

Today was spent driving along the length of the Great Ocean Road enjoying its twists and turns, and great sea scapes. A short dual with a Porsche and a Maserati proved we were no match for these power houses.

A trip out to the Cape Otway Lighthouse provided the highlight of the trip for some with us spotting some real and live Koala's in the trees that lined the road. Most saw two or three but Julie reckons she spotted over 15 as we drove along, yeah right!



One of several hundred Koalas that one of our group spotted.

We reached the 12 apostles of which we could only see 4 (the others have collapsed into the sea or headed north for warmer weather) just on dusk once again. But there were still people everywhere, I assisted one overseas visitor with his movie making much to his protests and we worked the crowd



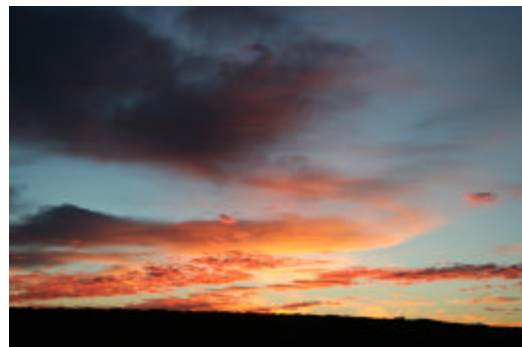
There is still only four?

with the MINI wave. In one car park two young ladies were returning to their rental car as we MINI'ed in and their comment was simply "Given up on the Harley's have we" Yep!

The amazing landforms along the coast looked great as the sun set in the continuing grey sky and then we headed for our o'nite accommodation at Port Campbell.

Port Campbell to Halls Gap

I tried to muster everyone for an early morning sunrise drive back to the 12/6 Apostles, but in the end only I managed to witness the brilliant red sunrise. Ged eventually joined me but after the sun had slid behind the thick cloud cover.



Not many clubMINI people saw the sunrise, so here it is guys and girls.

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The soft pink that reflected off the clouds above the Apostles at sunrise made the early morning rise and the chilly temperatures worth the effort.

The cloud and misty rain stayed with us most of the morning and the sight of a MacDonalds with a warm heater lured us in for lunch at Warnambool. We decided to go onto Port Fairy where there was a lot more shopping done before we turned the MINI noses north and headed to Halls Gap.



Honestly, it wasn't cold at London Bridge

On the way we spotted another MINI photo opportunity, a strange stack of rocks that looked like Stonehenge soon had a circle of MINI's around it and the locals that passed by stared in amazement.

We had great accommodation at Halls Gap and this time the Motel also had the best restaurant in town. So a good night was enjoyed by all.

Stonehenge in Victoria?



On these BIG MINI drives, it is a tradition that you keep your MINI in perfect presentation order, so a daily washing ritual is enjoyed by all. Even those that were not use to such antics were seen to join in, right John and Robyn? Water restrictions permitting of course.



The clubman gets a bath

Halls Gap to Echuca

We should have went up to the lookouts yesterday. Today dawned wet and cloudy. As we ascended the Grampians the mist rolled in and the lookouts produced visibility that did not exceed 2 metres, so the Balconies and the Views remained a mystery to all. We did take the walk to the bottom of McKenzie Falls where the grey light allowed for some great water shots.

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Before leaving the fog shrouded Grampians we took the walk to McKenzie Falls

It rained pretty much all day today as we drove on straight and flat roads to Echuca, but it did not dampen our enthusiasm.



Did I mention it rained all day?

We were booked into a Paddle steamer for a dinner cruise on the Murray and it proved to be excellent.



A foggy morning on the Murray with our paddle steamer in the background.



At the end of this rainbow, we found a MINI!

Echuca to Cooma

A big days drive along the Murray and then around the Hume Weir through intermittent showers and sunshine. We lunched in our favourite park at Tallangatta, experienced a rainbow near Corryong and afternoon tea with Kangaroos on the Alpine Way. We had a snow fight at Dead Horse Gap! Cooma was our overnight stop and dinner at the local RSL made for another fun day.



A snow fight on the Alpine Way was even enjoyed.

Cooma to Home

We must be going home today as it dawned bright and sunny, the morning washing of cars was delayed as we scraped the ice off them first. It was a glorious day and stopping for morning tea at Bungendore it was hard to get going again as sitting in the warm sun was just too good.

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The three wise monkeys?
 (Actually this is a very special photo, Steve has his mouth covered!)

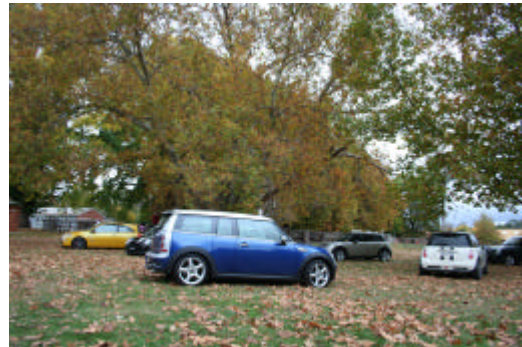
Conclusion

We had a great time, you really should join us on our next BIG MINI drive. We covered 2,700 kilometres, I averaged 75 kph for the whole trip at an average consumption of 7.8 litres although some had this down to 6.8 litres (must teach them how to push that right foot down) We had cold weather for the most part with one day not getting above 8 degrees, we had a fair bit of rain and one glorious day, but rather than detract from the experience it was agreed it added to it.



This big fella needs a shave if he wants to keep driving a MINI.

Thanks to those who participated and thanks to MINI Australia for their continued support.



MINI Australia supplied a new clubman and two spare tyres for our Great Ocean Road drive, thanks MA!

Those who attended

- Vic & Julie Widman
- Steve Borg
- Ged Dew
- Ros & Raoul Merten
- Chris & Judi Bucknor
- John & Robyn Simm
- Merv & Heather Dunlop
- Wayne & Belinda Desmond



Ros's immaculate JCW

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The cake eaters, errr I mean participants.



Ros



Heather



Julie



Norm



Wayne



Steve



Robyn



John



Vic

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Ged



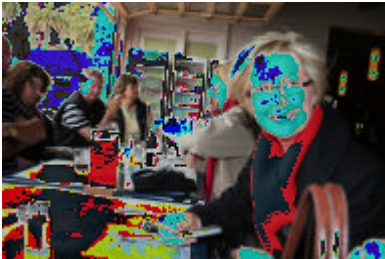
Chris & Judy with Steve & Julie



Ian & Colleen



And after all that food we had to work out how to access the facilities!!!!



Beverley



We love our MINI's

**Let's see you on the next
BIG MINI Drive.**

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