



Right: Norbert Reithofer, chairman of the board of management of BMW AG, poses in a Mini-E electric car at its official launch at the British embassy in Berlin.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Below right: An electric charger cable replaces the gas pump. The Mini E's 250kg battery pack charges in two hours from a high-power socket.

PHOTO: APF

Mini's debut is simply electric

BMW launches electric version of the British classic to great plaudits

BY ALOK JHA
THE GUARDIAN, MUNICH

To a casual observer, it looks no different from a standard modern Mini, the British classic reimagined, to great plaudits, by BMW. But look closer and there's something different about the Mini E, the latest addition to the range.

For a start, there are no back seats. And instead of a grease-caked engine under the bonnet there is a neat and clean arrangement of motors, pipes and electronics. On the dashboard, the rev-counter is gone, replaced by a dial to show how much power is left in the car's on-board battery. But perhaps the most noticeable thing is the Mini E's lack of noise: step on the accelerator and the car moves off with only the faintest whisper.

Two years in the making, the all-electric Mini E was unveiled at BMW's headquarters in Munich this week. It has arrived just as the EU agreed to slash emissions standards for cars.

"When people get out of the Mini E they smile," said Patrick Muller, the engineer at BMW who led the project. "People hear 'electric car' and everybody has a golf cart in mind or something with a flimsy plastic body. Here you get a full-blown car."

The Mini E is powered by a 150kW electric motor fed by a lithium-ion battery, giving it the equivalent of around 200 horsepower. With a top speed of 150kph, the car will travel 240km on a full charge and go from zero to 96kph in 8.5 seconds—equivalent to a standard Mini Cooper.

BMW will produce just 500 of the cars at first, destined for urban trials in California, New York and New Jersey. These cars, available to lease early next year for around US\$850 per month, will be followed by a further trial of 50 cars in Berlin in the summer.

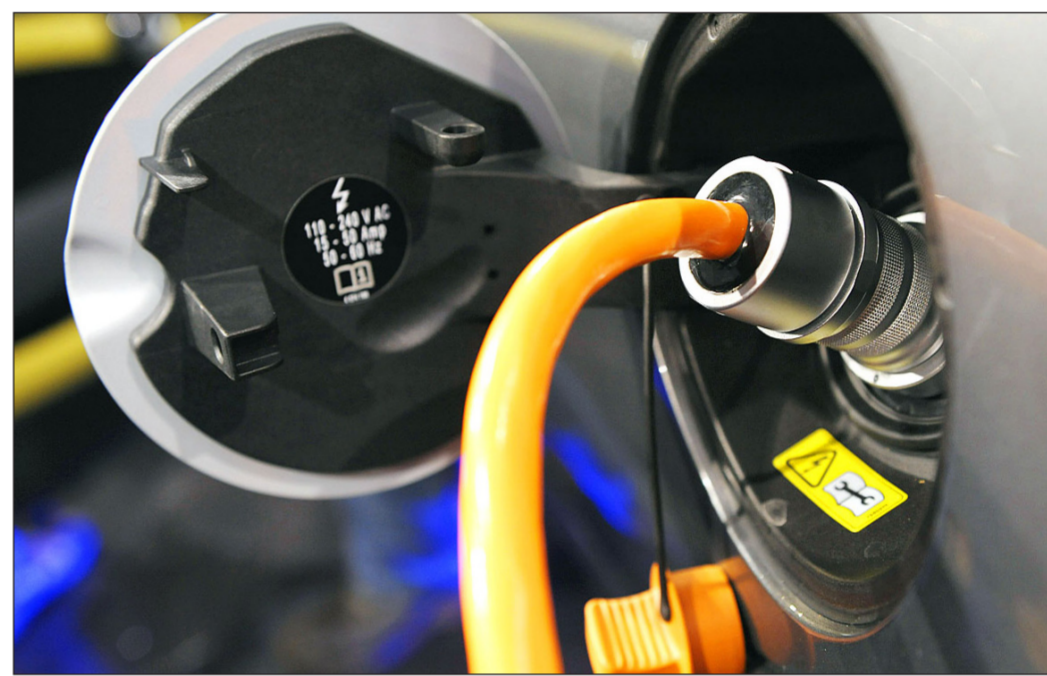
"The urban application is the ideal way to find out about everyday use and all-day capability of electric vehicles," said Alexander Thorwirth, BMW's marketing and operations manager. "We want to investigate the habits of users ... and how electric driving works."

Friends of the Earth's senior transport campaigner, Tony Bosworth, said electric cars had a significant part to play in the solutions needed to cut carbon emissions. "However, battery performance must improve, and the electricity should come from renewable energy sources."

The manufacturers claim the Mini E retains the nimble handling of its petrol and diesel-based cousins, but the performance comes at a cost: the back seats have been replaced by the 250kg battery pack, making the Mini E not only a two-seater but also heavier than standard cars.

To squeeze as much range as possible out of the Mini E's batteries its brakes act as power generators, topping up the batteries as the car slows down with energy that would otherwise be wasted as heat. The battery has a life of around 160,000km and can be fully charged in under two hours from a high-power socket. A standard household socket will recharge the battery in around 10 hours.

The Mini, designed by Alec Issigonis, first rolled off the production



line in 1959. The current model, which still retains many of the original's distinctive features, remains an iconic vehicle.

Mini enthusiasts welcomed the new car. Paul Mullett, editor of the mini2.co.uk Web site, said there had been much excited discussion as soon as rumors of the Mini E began circulating earlier this year. "I think it's a step in the right direction," he said. "It helps the whole move to alternative fuels as well. If a brand like Mini start using the technology and they get more people interested, it gets more real as opposed to more obscure, smaller start-ups that people maybe don't know."

The Mini E trial cars will be built at the dedicated Mini factory in Oxford, England, before being shipped to BMW headquarters in Munich to have the electric drive trains and batteries fitted. BMW plans to use the results in the US and Europe to inform the conversion of the remainder of its cars into lower-carbon alternatives.

The Mini E is among the first fruits of BMW's Project i, aimed at making cars of the future more environmentally friendly. "We don't think the internal combustion engine is going to disappear in the next five years, that's clear, but we need to open up alternatives," said Muller.



Above: Under the hood, a large box contains the electric motor, capable of pumping out around 200 horsepower.

PHOTO: REUTERS

[LIFESTYLE]

Wine and wisdom: how to drink responsibly

Increasingly ashamed of her rare but mortifying drunken displays, Viv Groskop decided to seek help. She spoke to experts and reformed bingers in her bid to achieve the Holy Grail of drinking: moderation

BY VIV GRSKOP
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

I am not an alcoholic but I do have a problem with drink. I rarely get properly drunk — maybe two or three times a year — but when I do, it's on a shameful, monumental scale. Historically, this has often coincided with the Christmas party season.

This year, however, will be different. Or that is the idea, at least.

Six months ago, after I found myself telling friends yet another "hilarious" tale of a drunken incident, I embarked on a self-imposed period of alcoholic awareness, designed to remove the possibility of ever again being incapacitated by drink. I realized that unless I could find a way to avoid my epic displays I would be forced down the route of the alcoholic and have to give up drink completely. I was going to have to learn to deal with one drink at a time. Here's what I, and others in my position, have discovered.

First, establish whether you have a drink problem.

This is easier said than done. Hypnotherapist Georgia Foster, author of *The Drink Less Mind* and a specialist in helping people gain control around alcohol, says: "Sometimes we all drink too much. The odd, one-off 'blitzing' moment is fine. But if it's a regular occurrence and it's not in check, that's a problem." That may be the case for many, but although my drunkenness was infrequent, to me, those blitzes felt problematic. Tania Glyde, author of *Cleaning Up: How I Gave Up Drinking and Lived*, agrees that defining the extent of your drink problem is often subjective. "When I gave up drinking, lots of people said to me, 'You weren't that big a drinker.' Some people are able to drink huge amounts and not worry about it. I think you only have a problem when you reach your personal limit of shame."

Sarah (not her real name), 29, faced this question three years ago. Now a personal trainer, she used to work in the City of London where binge drinking after work was common. "I wasn't an alcoholic in that I didn't need to drink every day," she says. "But if I went out, I had only to have one glass and I just wanted to keep on and on. Every time I drank, it would result in me getting drunk. I didn't have any control." She was becoming

increasingly miserable, smoking more and overeating, too.

TRY HYPNOTHERAPY

In 2005 Sarah saw a hypnotherapist for 12 one-hour sessions that, she says, helped re-program her mind, and convince her that she has control over her actions. It also helped her deal with other issues that were causing her stress and exacerbating her binge drinking. She now finds it easy to stop at two or three units. (She has also stopped smoking.) "I am at a point where I will happily say during an evening's drinking, 'Shall we just have a cup of tea?' instead of, 'Come on, let's do some [alcohol].'"

BE PROACTIVE, AND PREPARED TO LIE

Since her successful hypnotherapy sessions, Sarah still follows some tried and tested practical steps to help control her drinking. And I can vouch for the fact that these tips work even if you haven't been hypnotized (I've always found hypnosis a bit freaky). "Always order a glass of water with every alcoholic drink," says Sarah, "and drink them simultaneously. Stick to small drinks: be firm if someone insists on you having a large glass. If they complain, tell them you prefer small glasses because the drink stays colder." Be prepared for hostility, she adds: "A few people I used to work with did not respond to it well because they felt it was a judgment on them. I would just say: 'Get lost.'"

If it gets too much, says Foster, resort to fibbing. "Pretend you're taking antibiotics, that you have a big meeting the next day or that you have a hangover. Drinking less can be a big social problem — people feel guilty about it. They feel they

have to fit in with the social environment by drinking too much." In my experience, this is not always the case: I was with a very drunk friend the other night and apologized for ordering a Diet Coke. "You don't have to justify yourself to me," he slurred. The truth is, most people are too distracted by their own drinking to notice yours.

The other advice I have assiduously followed over the past six months is screamingly obvious, but it works. "It's all common sense really — eat before going out," says Don Shenker, chief executive of Alcohol Concern. "And don't drink in rounds," he adds, "because you feel obliged to have another drink even if you don't really want one." That sounds a bit Scrooge-like to me. My advice is: buy rounds if you can afford it, just exclude yourself if you want to.

ALCOHOL-FREE DAYS

Having a few days a week when you don't drink at all is crucial for gaining control of your alcohol consumption, says Foster. But seven out of 10 of her clients are bemused when she advises this. "Most of the people I see have drunk pretty much every day since they went to university."

Personally, I can go for days without drinking, though, and then have no idea of moderation when I do drink. Commonly, people who are infrequent binge drinkers are perfectionists, says Foster. "They're very good when they're not drinking,

but as soon as they drink, their rebelliousness comes out and they become 'perfect' at doing the opposite of what they're supposed to. When I work with someone like that I try to tell them to stop driving the system so perfectly — because something is going to give." This is me all over.

EXERCISE EXTREME VIGILANCE AROUND FREE BOOZE

"There is a real attitude of, 'If it's free, we are obliged to consume it,'" says Glyde. "It seems rude not to swipe as much free alcohol as possible." Plus, alcohol is not called a social lubricant for nothing: "Work-related parties can be so intimidating," she says. "Especially if you are supposed to be networking. Everyone is looking over their shoulders, gimlet-eyed. The pressure of having to act like someone you're not brings out the child in all of us. I can remember spitting wine over a company director once and thinking, 'Aren't I clever? I'm really pissed, but I don't care.'" If you are aware of all these factors, have admitted to yourself that you are nervous or intimidated, then you don't have to get caught up in them.

Shenker's key party survival suggestion is to avoid top-ups from waiters: "Finish your glass and pick up a fresh one so you know exactly how much you've had. Decide in advance how much you are going to drink and stick to it."

IF IN DOUBT, DON'T DRINK AT ALL

If you are like me, then there will be some times in your life — periods of stress, anxiety or childish over-excitement — when you are better off not drinking because the risk of getting trolleyed is too high. Taking the car is my top tip for complete alcohol avoidance in these situations. When I first resolved never to get drunk again I drove everywhere for weeks and drank nothing. Once you've done that for a while, when you start drinking again you can re-learn your limits. Now I know how I feel after one glass (not much different to sober), how I feel after two (a bit merry), and after three (disastrously drunk and ready to become more so). For the first time in my life I have an idea of when I am supposed to stop. I can say from experience that it is far more rewarding than letting gravity decide.

