

# Lyons on Wheels

by Dan Lyons • *Special to The Daily Gazette*

## 2025 MINI JCW Countryman ALL4

MSRP: \$38,900 (Countryman S) As Tested: \$51,995



The third generation MINI makes its debut for 2025, with an eight model roster and a foreshortened name. The all new lineup is now known simply as MINI, with the Cooper label reserved for the smaller two door, four door and convertible models. They're joined by a compact SUV (Countryman), which is also offered as an EV. Finally, a trio of high performance variants appear under the JCW banner. My test drive this week is in the Countryman JCW; the sportiest of the "big" MINI's.

BMW has owned the MINI brand for over thirty years, and the platform that's found beneath the latest models is the same as that of BMW's X1 series. All versions of Countryman feature AWD. Under the bonnet, Countryman S employs a 2.0L four cylinder engine. The twin turbo four (241 horsepower, 295 lb.-ft. of torque) is matched with a 7-speed, dual clutch automatic transmission. The company quotes a 0-60 time of 6.2 seconds, with fuel economy estimated at 24/32//27. JCW versions run the same 2.0L four, tweaked to the tune of 312 h.p., and 295 lb.-ft. of torque. Here as elsewhere, stick shifts have gone the way of the telephone land line, though the dual clutch 7-speed automatic can be operated as a manumatic, with paddle shifters. The 0-60 time is estimated at 5.2 seconds, and MPG's are predicted to be 23/32/26 (I logged 25). On the road, the JCW Countryman feels quite lively off the line and pulls evenly to speed. There are no less than eight drive modes available; each accompanied by its own design theme on the display screen, and even sound effects. (For example, switching into Go Kart drive mode prompts the system to announce, "Yahoo"). It's all in fun and if it isn't fun: a. You may not be in the target market, and b. The effects can be disabled. Handling is



*Photos are courtesy of the manufacturer.*



crisp and genuinely sporty – words that are rarely brought up when discussing SUV's. The giveback for all that cornering grip is a ride that's stiff and jittery on anything less than smooth pavement. Standard All Wheel Drive is a boon in all seasons, but Snow belters like us would do well to swap the JCW's standard, summer performance tires for a set of all season rubber.

The JCW interior is a quirky mashup of fun and function. The dash view is dominated by the pie-sized center touchscreen; a holdover from the previous generation. A myriad of choices are offered for personalizing the look of the display screen. Photos can even be imported into the layout. I like the nubby, carpet-like cover for the dashboard, which offsets the basic plastic below the beltline. Cabin negatives include a general slowness of response to touch inputs, random menu placement, and the relegation of some controls (HVAC settings, etc.) to small, virtual buttons, in locations that are hard to find/adjust quickly. Storage space for smaller items is limited to a decidedly small, covered container on the center console, adjoining tray space, and modest, door pockets.

Driving position is good as is front seat comfort. The steering wheel's pronounced padding at 10 and 2 won't suit some drivers. Six footers in back will just fit behind like-size folks in front. Overall cargo capacity is good: 25-56 cubic-feet, depending on how seats are deployed. There's also a useful stowage bin, hidden below deck in back.

Name notwithstanding, there's little "sport" in most Sport Utility Vehicles. The JCW Countryman bucks that trend. It's the most performance minded version of MINI's least mini product, and an interesting alternative to driving the same 'ol Sport Ute.

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