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£100,000 for a Mini?

Malcolm McKay reports on a record-breaking car with a rallying pedigree

The classic Mini is disappearing fast – how often do you see one in daily use? Less than seven years after production ended, the vast majority of the five million sold between 1959 and 2000 has been scrapped; incredibly, the everlasting Morris Minor seems more plentiful on British roads now.

However, if there was any doubt that the Mini remains as revered and respected as ever, it was dispelled at Bonhams' auction at Race Retro, the historic motorsport show last weekend, when a 1964 model sold for £100,500. This is almost certainly the highest price ever paid for a Mini – certainly the highest at auction. It doesn't mean, though, that your granny's rusty old Mini 850 is suddenly worth a fortune. Prices of all good, rust-free Minis are rising, but this is a very special car.

Icon of British car production, the front-wheel-drive Mini was designed by Alec Issigonis as the ultimate, uncompromised packaging exercise – almost by accident, it also handled and held the road incredibly well and was enormous fun to drive. When the Mini was taken in hand by successful race-car builder John Cooper, a series of extremely competitive Mini Coopers was born. The ultimate, 1,275cc Cooper S wasn't wildly fast in a straight line, but on a twisty road or circuit few other cars could keep up, especially if you added snow, ice, rain and gravel – Minis excelled at rallying.

Britain's RAC Rally was only once won by a Mini, driven by Rauno Aaltonen and Tony Ambrose in 1965, and it was this car, DJB 93B (below), that they drove. It won the 1966 Scottish Rally too, driven by Tony Fall, before its retirement. It has now been restored beautifully to its original specification, modified only to keep it competitive in historic rallying today, and was bought by a British collector.

