

Living with a Nightmare



Boys and girls of every age, wouldn't you like to see something strange? Come with us and you will see, this, our Mini of Halloween...

For it was a cold winter's night when King Jack of Birmingham found life under new ownership.

It all began many years ago when women lusted to look like Cindy Crawford and men aspired to be Bon Jovi. As was the case with 35-year-old Grant

Woodhouse (more Metallica than Bon Jovi), Jack's future owner, who was living the dream working in a guitar shop – think *Wayne's World*.

"My life was all about guitars and bands, never into cars at all," says Grant. "But once my first band started gigging I needed something to carry all the gear around in."

Grant's first car wasn't a Mini, but it wasn't far off – an Austin Metro 1.3. With the back seats down, the band's equipment fit in no problem. "We were only gigging pubs, so the amps weren't huge... yet!", he explains. But by fate, the hand of God, or just Grant's bad driving, the Metro died a few months later after a crash. Now, we don't want to give Grant a bad name, but he says he also 'bumped' his next car – a Ford Fiesta 1.1, which was quickly followed by another Metro and Fiesta again. While on the search again, his sister mentioned a Mini for sale.

"I laughed at her, telling her 'it had best have a roof rack! How would I fit all my guitars in



WORDS Craig McBeth
PHOTOS Ben Whitehouse



Pinstriped doorcards, white seat piping and a multitude of skulls give a creepy Halloween feel.

Hand-painted by Grant.



the back of that?!", he recalls. But check it out he did, and after taking it for a test drive he was hooked, taking it off the guy for £500.

"The first thing I did was stick some huge Spiderman stickers in the back windows," says Grant. "I had that one for about a year and a half. She ran great, but one day just got slower and slower until she wouldn't run anymore." And of course in those days Minis were two a penny so not many people cared if they were run into the ground.

'Tank'ing it

As the band got bigger – as well as the amps – another Mini wouldn't have been practical, so he bought another Metro instead, naming it 'The Tank'. "It felt huge after the

Mini," he says.

But it wasn't long until Grant was back in a Mini – this time an Estate, after someone ran into The Tank, turning it into a tin. Using it as a workhorse for his gigging equipment the roomy back end and

I swapped a VW Beetle for a Clio, simply because it had a heater

opening rear doors of the Estate made short work of loading and unloading. The Mini served him well for a good few years, until it too was written off by someone crashing into him. Again, this could have been fate, as after a year on foot Grant picked up a 1974 Purple Beetle which he needed to impress a girl. The Beetle drove like a boat, was slow, unresponsive, and the

inside

froze up in the winter, but impress it did, and that girl is now his wife. Once he'd snagged her though, he swapped it for Clio; "because it had a heater," he says. Smart move.

Come December 2008 and through general conversation Grant mentioned to his then-fiancé that he'd love to have another Mini one day. And, as if by magic, one appeared for sale around the corner from their new house. "It was exactly what I was looking for," says Grant, "black with a white roof, MkI grille and 10-inch wheels."

As an early Christmas present Grant bought Jack – which is actually short for Jacqueline – on Christmas Eve. She is a 1990 Checkmate with a standard 998cc engine.

Me and the Estate.



The original workhorse.



Jack getting some TLC.



"Looking over her with my lack of mechanical knowledge, she seemed fine. The test drive took me back to when I had my first Mini 15 or so years ago. She drove great, so I struck, what I thought was, a deal with the guy."

After a cup of tea at home the desire to show her off to friends and family became too much, so they decided to take her out for a drive. "Typically for me, she didn't start up, so jokingly she instantly became the Nightmare Before Christmas to us and I mounted a small Jack Skellington bust on the dash." And so Jack/Jacqueline was born.

However, Grant's mechanical genius neighbour - Paul - has kept Jack running sweet as a nut ever since, and has even come to the rescue in emergencies when the lights failed and she broke down

twice. What a guy, the things people do for Minis.

A new adventure

With a new car, new year and soon to be new wife, the scene was set to embark on a new adventure into the Mini community, and a year's worth of Mini 50 shows lay ahead. First stop was a cold January event at Bingley Hall, Staffordshire. "It was our first-ever Mini show and the seed of our new obsession. It showed us just why the classic Mini is known as the Mr Potato Head of the car world."

So they got in on the act and started their personalisation of Jack - buying a pair of headlamp eyelids and set of HT leads. Seeing the Betty Boop-themed Mini also gave them some food for thought, and in February that recipe began to take shape, with the interior given the Nightmare



BEWARE:
Skulls bite.

Nightmare...

treatment.

The doorcards were painted black with white pinstripes to match Jack Skellington's suit, while the window winders received

Jack Skellington heads and Grant even

hand-painted a new knob for the glovebox.

At the spring Malvern

Show the compiling of

the never-ending list of

extras began, but it was

the radio-

controlled replica Minis that fascinated him the most. "I knew I had to make a clone of mine too," he says.

After popping along to a local Morris show, where Grant's partner fell in love with beautiful Purple Morris Pick-up (ahh, we see, it's the purple she likes huh?), the couple had a rather busy month in May – as they got married after 10 years together. Congratulations. But there was still time to visit Himley Hall and get some more stuff for Jack.

Ticked off the list

was a set of wind deflectors and a shiny GB sticker, but now added is a flip front! "And I've found a strong new love for the Riley Elf! I will have one some day," exclaims Grant.

As I was pouring the second tub of oil in,
I knew it was too much...





Centre caps and tyre valves get the treatment.

Cornwall was the honeymoon destination and Jack wasn't going to be left behind. The newlyweds' friends had decorated the Mini with balloons, flowers and the obligatory 'Just Married' sign, and on the way down south they were greeted with many cheerful road users pipping their horns to wish them luck. However, something tends to go wrong to make these trips more memorable, right? And a honeymoon is a perfect occasion.

"As we passed Bristol we needed to stop for fuel, I filled up and was ready to carry on with our journey but I noticed my oil light came on and stayed on. In a panic I ran to the petrol station and bought a litre and poured the lot in the engine, waited a moment and checked the dipstick. To my bemusement it only

showed a drip at the bottom of the stick, so I shot back into the station for another litre... As I was pouring the second tub in I knew it was too much, but I was just going with what the dipstick was telling me. All this time my newlywed wife was telling me 'that's way too much, you know'. My initial response was: 'what do you know about cars, you can't even drive!'.

I whipped
out the

dipstick to prove my point and it was still just a little drip at the bottom of the stick. I looked under the car for leaks, but nothing. I couldn't understand it. Then I had a brainwave; start the car, it may mix the old and new oil round a little. It did and I'd gone over the MAX point by a fair way. Panicking, I decided to hit the motorway and burn off the extra oil. As we got back up to speed I looked in the mirror to see a huge cloud of smoke behind us, I slowed down and as the smoke started to dissipate I could see the outline of another Mini behind us. I pulled over to the hard shoulder and, to my





Baby Melody is growing accustomed to her new surroundings.

relief, so did he.

After a brief introduction our new friend, Ben, from Minis of Tiverton (MOT), told us to follow him and he'd not only get us safely off the motorway but also get us some help. My wife - now quite smug telling me 'I told you so' while I was thinking I'd killed our little car - and I sat down for a coffee, Twenty minutes later Ben returns with another member of MOT, James. He whipped a trolley jack out of the back of his car, hitched up our poor motor and promptly drained our oil and refilled us back up to the correct level. I'll always be eternally grateful to those guys, they not only got us out of a very sticky situation but also saw us safely back on our way." Mini camaraderie strikes again.

Wonders of the web

Disaster averted the happy couple returned from their honeymoon and continued with their integration into the Mini scene. After picking up some chrome wheel-arch covers at Birmingham MOC's Cannon Hill Park show, they popped along to

Mini Spares Midlands' Open Day. It was here that Grant spotted a '50s American classic in black and green, sporting some cool hand-crafted stainless steel cobweb headlight covers. "I knew they'd fit in perfectly with our Nightmare theme," says Grant, "so I got talking to the owner and she told me to see Ms Metal's website in the USA. It didn't take me long to Google her and get a pair ordered."

With 2009 being the Mini's 50th anniversary, it was fortunate that Grant and his wife had become involved just at the right time - and living in Birmingham, the IMM was just a stone's throw away compared to some of the pilgrimages some other owners had undertaken. Being so close it would have been rude not to attend, so attend they did, and they were amazed to see so many Minis from so far away. "The best part for me was just wandering round the huge camping area looking at all the clubs and seeing how far people had come," Grant remembers.

After visiting the Uttoxeter show and falling in love with the ELF-240

Web-tastic.



Mini caravan and some 10-inch Starmags, it was off to Stanford Hall. "My wife found a lovely purple (Purple again!) Mini Pick-up that she took a fancy to and I now want my Mini deseamed!" Ah, the joys of Mini ownership and the many creative, and usually conflicting, ideas that whiz through our heads.

As October finally drew in, the couple had decided that Jack had to be ready for Halloween and their trip to Disneyland Paris. Over the previous months they'd set the wheels in motion when Grant got a mate to make up some Nightmare... door and roof decals for the car. These finally came through and the bulk of the theme was in place and looking good. The trip abroad was an adventure in itself, with the

convoy taking wrong turns and the usual Mini maladies of oil leaks etc. as they drove through France. But they made it and met some good people along the way. "We made some more friends including Oz the Gopher & Phil, Martin and Emily, Sherrie Haslett, and Michael and Holly with the Tigger van – who had unknowingly inspired us to do this trip after seeing the Tigger van in last year's review," says Grant.

"I was extra proud, as not only were we at the second home of Disney in a Mini for the Mini's 50th, but it was Halloween too - my car couldn't have been more appropriate." After the show the couple ran back into the park to get a photo taken with Jack Skellington himself, perfectly rounding off the weekend.

Minis v Bugs

Even after a hectic year the couple didn't let up on their travels. Just a few weeks later they shot off to the autumn Malvern Mini show. This was followed by a charity turn out for Children in Need, when word got round that there was a VWs vs Minis meet at the Waterman Pub near Coventry.

Both CV1 Minis and Medievil Mini clubs welcomed the pair and as well as the Minis there was a mix of pimped out campers and bugs.

"One lucky fella pulled up in

his camper towing his Minivan behind him," says Grant.

"He said he couldn't decide which

one to bring, it would be like leaving one of his children at home if he had to pick just one!"

And so the perfect Mini year was rounded off with a final show at Stoneleigh for Christmas celebrations where

Inspired by others at the Malvern Mini show.



One lucky fella pulled up in his camper towing his Minivan behind him

they met up with friends they had made over past 12 months. Medievil Minis invited them to display Jack on their stand and the Horslers were there in full

Christmas gear with a copy of their club newsletter which had Grant's car on the cover.

As far as introductions go to the Mini scene Grant and his wife have dived right into the deep end and have come out smiling. In future though the Mini is going to have to cope with being treated with a little bit of contempt and

disrespect... why? Well you know what kids are like, and they've just had another addition to the family. Baby Melody was born in May 2010, and is fast becoming a regular on the Mini scene with the family – although how keen mummy is at being relegated to the back seat we're not quite sure yet... As for Jack, he's no longer a nightmare, as he continues to run like a dream, turning heads and most importantly, giving the kiddies a good scare at Halloween.

Our man Jack is King of the Pumpkin patch. Everyone hail to the Pumpkin King

