

IN SEARCH OF A LOST CORD

It's not the most likely place to expect a new Mini production facility to be established, is it? However surprised you may be, Mini production began last December in Venezuela, South America. It is a quite remarkable business agreement that was signed between Rover and FACORCA in April 1990. The name of the Venezuelan company actually comes from Fabrica de Motores y Carrocerias Cordillera Facorca C.A. - MiniCord (printed as one word) is a lot simpler.

Now many international motor companies do deals known as KD operations. This involves selling 'Knocked Down' kits to a country for them to build and sell internally. This gets round any necessary import restrictions that a country may have, and by allowing the cars to be built in the country it offers much needed employment. It is often the case that the country does not wish to take a complete 100 per cent kit, but needs to add its own input to the vehicle, this allows for a percentage of local content that also helps that country's economy. In the agreement with Rover, the British company supplies engines, transmission and instruments, with FACORCA doing the rest - which obviously includes the bodywork.

The surprising thing about the MiniCord is that it has a GRP monocoque. From the pictures shown here and comments from Rover engineers, it is of a very high quality. The Venezuelan's proudly comment that they believe it is up to the standard of Lotus and Lamborghini - and they say so in their adverts.

Production of these monocoques is quite labour intensive. Interestingly the original prototypes were seamless, but because the mould had to be split at the seams when the process was developed for mass production, the seams have now reappeared. Issigonis would be impressed. The body actually weighs the same as a steel one so there is no weight saving, but it is claimed that it does absorb noise better than steel and so the cars are actually quieter. Five - very bright - colours are produced; yellow, red, blue, green and black.

Rover had engineers working at FACORCA during the first year ensuring that production ran smoothly. The A-series 998cc engines power the MiniCord and these use leaded fuel as unleaded petrol is not available in Venezuela. There are three models in the MiniCord range: Basic, which is the same spec as an UK Mini City; a slightly improved version known as the Sport; and the Supersport with leather trim, air conditioning, alloy wheels and fog lamps. The Venezuelans also contacted John Cooper early in the production plan and

This is perhaps the most surprising Mini story of the year. Brand new Minis are now being produced in Venezuela . . . and they are made with fibreglass bodies

Cooper conversions are also available. The company is looking to produce between 3 - 5000 models a year.

Venezuela still has many thousands of enormous US gas guzzlers on the roads so the MiniCord out-performs these both in economy and acceleration! Early signs are that the project has gone down a storm with the locals. When the President wants to go for a drive where he doesn't get noticed, he leaves the Mini behind and takes his Ferrari! The MiniCord has been promoted on national television and at Christmas the MiniCords replaced Santa's reindeer on a mobile float (floats are a traditional method of promotion in Venezuela).

As this is being written, MiniWorld has discovered that one MiniCord has been ordered by Rover in the UK and yes, we have been told that when it arrives a test drive will be possible. So keep watching this space, there's more to come on this story. **NF**



Left: The MiniCord has proved very popular in Venezuela and is now receiving a great deal of publicity from its 'noble dynasty' (below)

Opposite page: The FACORCA factory is not perhaps as modern as some, but the fibreglass production process is very worker intensive. If you look carefully you can see the authentic body 'seams'



EL MÁXIMO REPRESENTANTE EN VENEZUELA DE UNA NOBLE DINASTÍA.
UNA SABIA COMBINACIÓN DE ESPACIO, POTENCIA, LUGO Y ESTILO CON LA MAS AVANZADA TECNOLOGIA INGLESA.

Producida en Venezuela por FACORCA bajo el respaldo y la estrecha supervisión tecnológica del GRUPO ROVER LTD. de Inglaterra. MINICORD pertenece al más clásico, pero también al más vanguardista automóvil a todos los MINI desde su nacimiento hasta el presente. Muchos son los eventos que engloban a este digno representante inglés.
Primer automóvil con motor transversal y tracción delantera. Generador de 26 Hefes internacionales. 3 de ellos en Montecarlo. Y su más reciente, ITALY PIRELLI.
El 80% de su repuesto total es para usted y sus pasajeros.
Único automóvil en Venezuela con climatizador patentado de por vida. Conectado con la super redonda Bose CD/MP de alta calidad. Si interna que utilizan Porsche, Lotus, Lamborghini, yates y aviones de combate.

MINI
ILD MAXIMO!

Producida por FACORCA con el respaldo y la supervisión tecnológica del GRUPO ROVER LTD.

President of the new Venezuelan concern is Victor Vargas, (below left) standing with Rover's Tim Soar



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