



ABOVE: Marina Martin with her 2008 MINI Clubman. All photos courtesy of Marina Martin.

"I Must Be Out Motoring..."

BY JAMES MARTIN

With her Italian accent, sense of style, and high-powered car, long-time Capitol Hill resident Marina Martin could be mistaken for a Grand Prix race driver. She isn't – but she can drive like one.

While shopping for a new car seven years ago, Marina came upon some of the first ads for the new, re-engineered MINI Cooper – the fast hatchback introduced by BMW to much fanfare in 2002. She knew instantly that she had to have one, having driven a classic Mini Minor Innocenti (her second car, after a Fiat 500) when she lived in Rome. It was a perfect fit.

"It's just the coolest car," she says. "Tons of personality and performance. I can zip around big SUVs and find the best parking spots. Perfect for DC streets."



At the starting line at the Virginia International Raceway

BELOW: On an Autocross.



Among the first on the east coast to have a MINI, Marina wasn't content merely with turning heads on Capitol Hill. She races the cars, too. "I managed to get one of the GPs. Only 2000 were made, and I've got number 142!" Properly called the "MINI Cooper S with John Cooper Works Grand Prix Touring Kit," the GP, or "GyPsy" as Marina calls it, is a specially lightened, high-power version of the powerful Cooper S model. Marina races the car at local autocross events.

Why MINI? "The MINI is just like me – quick, fun, and ready to go! Anyone who knows me, whether it's

a client or a neighbor here on the Hill, can tell you that the MINI was made for me," she says. Stepping into Marina's office leaves no doubt as to the effect the car has had on her life. It's decorated with MINI photos, posters, calendars (she and her GyPsy were featured in one Italian calendar), keepsakes from races, even a MINI mouse pad. She belongs to Italian and British MINI clubs, as well as local and national clubs in the US, and has coordinated the MINI contingent of the Capitol Hill Fourth of July parade.

Her vacations are organized around the International MINI United Festival, held every other year in Europe, where Marina has had the opportunity to drive a MINI on Formula 1 and Formula 3 tracks; learn and perfect new driving tricks ("agent turning"); drive go-karts against French and German teams; hang around with MINI community celebrities like Rauno Aaltonen (the "Rally Professor" who won the Monte Carlo Rally in 1967), Mike Cooper (the son of the famous John Cooper for whom the cars are named), or MINI executives talking about performance, marketing style and future designs. Buying six MINIs in less than seven years, she currently owns three MINIs (a 2008 Clubman, 2008 Convertibles S, and a 2006 MINI S GP), has made her well known in New Jersey where MINI is headquartered.

Marina's enthusiasm for the MINI has led her to take advanced driving and racing courses at nearby Summit Point, and at Virginia International Raceway. She has also graduated from the prestigious BMW Performance Driving School in South Carolina. With all this training, how fast does she drive? "Well, on the street, of course I obey the speed limit. On the track - I don't know. I never look down at the speedometer. I can't afford to take my

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Marina Martin.

eyes off the track. One small distraction and I find myself off the track! The most important thing I've learned is 'the car goes where the eyes look.'

Ask her for her favorite MINI moment and there's no hesitation. "Last year at Virginia International Raceway I beat a guy by almost two full seconds. Leaving men behind always makes me feel good, but this one was special because he was racing with a GP (the same MINI as mine). I don't think he took me too seriously because I'm a woman. He sure took me seriously after eating some of my dust."

So what does the future hold? Marina's upcoming racing season is quite full. In March, she's headed back to Carolina Motorsports Park to spend two days in a MINI Challenge for intense one-on-one instruction from Phil Wicks, a stunt drivers who drove one of the Minis in the classic Michael Caine movie, *The Italian Job*.

So if you try to call her don't be surprised if her answering machine greets you with "Sorry I missed your call, I must be out motoring..."

Marina supports her MINI driving passion by working as an accountant in Capitol Hill.

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