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Fiat 500X SUV – Road Test

Published: April 27, 2018

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Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/fiat-500x-suv-road-test/>



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Fiat's 500X compact SUV – not to be forgotten.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency)

Such has been the huge growth in demand for SUV/Crossover types of vehicles that manufacturers right across the car industry have flooded the market with their offerings so it's easy to forget or overlook some of those that have been with us for a while.

One such range is the Fiat 500X compact SUV, first launched in the UK in 2015, with five doors and the choice of 2WD and 4WD models. It sits within the iconic Fiat 500 range



between the 500 City Car, 500C Convertible and the 500L five and seven seat MPVs.

The 500X has numerous competitors such as the Nissan Juke, Peugeot 2008, Vauxhall Mokka X/Crossland X, MINI Countryman, Suzuki Vitara/Ignis, Kia Stonic and Renault Captur to name just a few.

On the road prices for the 500X, following the industry wide increase in VED road tax costs, plus upgrades in 2018 model year specification, see the range kick-off at £15,555 and rise through 12 derivatives to £25,565. The 2018 revised spec levels are now Pop and Pop Star and the more 'butchly' styled Cross Plus level which have larger front and rear bumpers and underbody skid plates in keeping with their SUV potential and this spec level also offers two AWD (4WD) derivatives.

The 2WD engine options are a 1.6 E-Torq 110 hp petrol manual, 1.4 litre MultiAir turbo 140 hp manual and automatic, 1.6 litre MultiJet 120 hp turbodiesel manual and auto. With 4WD there is the 1.4 litre MultiAir 170 hp petrol automatic and 2.0 litre MultiJet 140 hp turbodiesel automatic.

Whilst originally diesel engines were the most popular, like other brands there has been a shift to petrol units so the 1.4 litre 140 hp unit looks the best buy coupled with the Pop Star spec level, and this model with a manual gearbox costs £18,655, or with the DCT twin clutch automatic transmission I tested £20,155.



Just as I received my 500X for road testing a press release from Fiat pinged into my In-box outlining the specification changes for the 2018 model year, strangely not introduced for the 18 registration plate month of March. Anyway the latest improvements are mainly to do infotainment technology and a simplified line-up which I have already outlined.

The Fiat 500X Model Year 2018 offers next-generation Uconnect with a 7-inch high-resolution touchscreen from the Pop Star trim level upwards and also offers Apple CarPlay and Android Auto as standard for a smarter, safer way to use your phone in the car. The system offers key features including Bluetooth interface with hands-free system, audio



streaming, text message reader and voice recognition. Android Auto offers access to Google Maps with voice-guided navigation, real time traffic information and lane guidance, and Google Play Music among other music services. These functions allow drivers to make and receive calls and send messages while remaining focused on the road ahead.

The standard equipment levels can be boosted with the addition of a number of packs, such as the £400 Cold Weather pack, which comes with a heated steering wheel, heated front seats and heated wiper area, or the £350 City pack to add electrically folding and heated door mirrors and rear parking camera and on my test car was fitted the Comfort Pack of rear seat head restraints, driver's seat lumbar support, and height adjustable boot floor, steering wheel gear shift paddles at £175 and metallic paint at £550, a rise of £200 over the previous 2017 model year price. For the 2018 model year the 3D sat-nav becomes a £250 option for the Pop Star level whereas on my 2017 test drive version it was standard, however the fiddly 5-inch touchscreen has now been upgraded to a 7-inch one. So whilst there have been some spec improvements for the 2018 model year there have also been price increases and less appealing lower standard equipment changes.

The base Pop spec list includes air-con, cruise control, 16-inch steel wheels, remote central locking, electronic parking brake, tyre pressure monitoring and an inflation kit instead of a spare wheel. The major items fitted to the best selling Pop Star spec level include front fog lights, rear parking sensors, auto dual zone air-con, 17-inch alloy wheels, DAB radio with Bluetooth and leather covered steering wheel with multifunction controls. The top Cross Plus level has additions including all-road bumpers, half leather upholstery, driving mode selector for 4WD versions, lane keep assist, keyless entry and push button start, dark tinted rear windows, and 18-inch alloy wheels.



Externally styling wise nothing has really changed for the 500X since it was launched. It carries on with its iconic styling hints of the 500 City Car but with its extended wheelbase to accommodate the addition of rear passenger doors. It has a moulded shape, best described as a Fiat 500 City Car on steroids, with rounded body lines rather than the sharper lines and sculptured panels of its competitors in its sector. It has the familiar Fiat 500 family front face but scaled up so retaining its family genes. It is however not based on the 500's platform as like the 500L MPV it uses a platform based on the Jeep Renegade SUV taken from the Fiat-Chrysler Automobiles alliance.



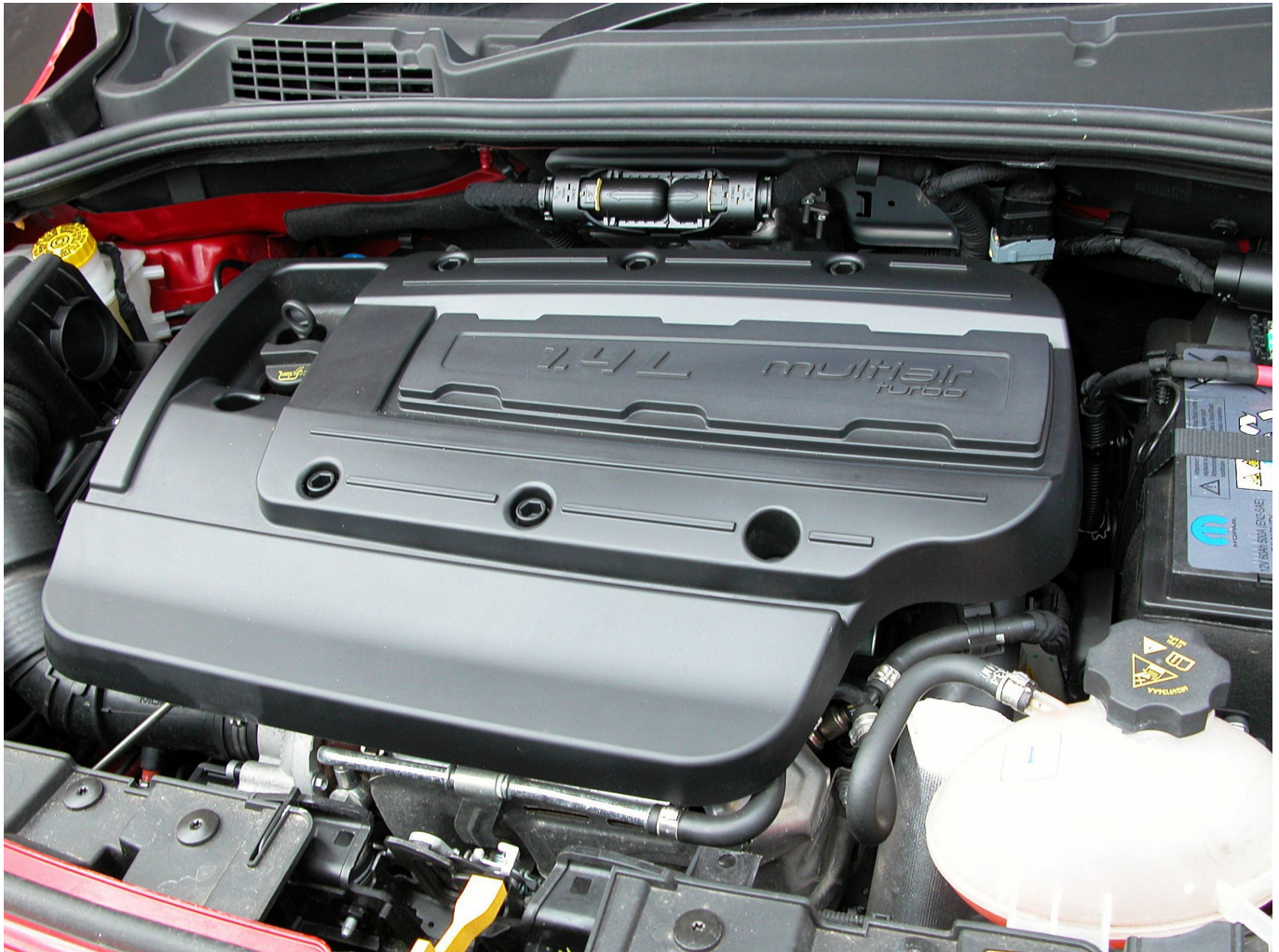
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Inside though its more akin to the Fiat 500 City Car with its iconic dashboard which accommodates upper and lower glove-boxes and centrally positioned is the touchscreen, thankfully now for 2018 models, larger than the version I tried and hopefully easier to use. All the other controls are where you expect to find them but the multifunction controls, a series of arrowed push-buttons on the steering wheel, are not that logical to use and I had to delve into the handbook to work out how to zero the trip and mpg readings. Once learnt it was ok but it's not the most logical design. The dashboard had a brightly coloured plastic overlay in keeping with the vehicle's exterior bodywork colour so there was some harmony within its exterior and interior design. There is a good amount of soft-feel interior trim throughout including the interior door panels. The seats were comfortable, the rear 60/40



split rear seats will accommodate three children well enough but two adults will find it a bit of a pinch for rear seat legroom. At the rear is a 350 litre (12.36 cu.ft) boot with access via a wide opening tailgate, and above the rear window is a spoiler which helps with increasing the aerodynamic exterior looks over the 'blunt' and rounded body shape. The thick front A pillars do restrict front quarter visibility at road junctions and rear quarter visibility is also restricted. Given the 500X is an urban SUV/Crossover, where visibility for driving in traffic will be its main role in life, the SUV styling is more about fashion than functional use.

The suspension is set up to provide a relatively soft ride but its higher ground clearance and elevated centre of gravity does produces body lean during cornering. Although by and large the ride is comfortable on good road surfaces, shocks from impacts from potholes are noticeably felt inside the vehicle. For urban driving and at commuter speeds the handling is sure-footed and well balanced but raise the speed on winding country roads and the handling gets 'lively' and the vehicle will pitch fore and aft and side to side over undulating road surfaces so you need to adjust your speed accordingly. During open road motorway cruising the handling was more predictable and certainly better appreciated by my fellow passengers.



My 500X test car had the 1.4 MultiAir, four cylinder turbocharged petrol engine with 140 hp and 230 Nm (170 lb.ft) of torque at 2,250 rpm. This is a high revving unit which needs to be kept in its powerband sweet spot and that was helped somewhat by the six-speed twin clutch automatic gearbox. This unit doesn't supply fast acting gearchanges as other DCT units in normal auto mode, but the immediacy of changes sharpened up when the gearshift paddles were used. Top speed is 118 mph and the zero to 62 mph took 9.9 seconds. Officially the Combined Cycle fuel economy figure is 49.6 mpg but during my week of motoring, the usual long and short journeys, the vehicle's computer readout showed an average of 28 mpg, very disappointing if that was the true figure. However I decided to do a fill-up to fill-up check and the figure was 35.7 mpg, still not anywhere near the official figure but more accurate than the vehicle's computer. With CO2 emissions of 133 g/km, the new



VED road tax charges are £205 First Year rate and then £140 Standard rate. Company car drivers will pay 27% Benefit-in-Kind tax; insurance is a competitive Group 11.

VERDICT

With over 3.5 million SUVs of all shapes and sizes on UK roads now and with their sales increasing by 90% during the last ten years, say the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, even the Fiat 500 family needs the 'X' factor to meet buying trends and fashions.

For: Popular SUV styling in the Fiat 500 range, a practical small SUV City Car, classy interior, nice quality trim, some upgraded infotainment functions for the latest 2018 models, a simplified new model range line-up.

Against: Increases in on-the-road prices above the new VED costs, sat-nav removed as a standard fit item on most models, very inaccurate computer mpg readout, harsh ride over poor road surfaces.



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Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Fiat 500X Pop Star, 1.4 MultiAir 140 hp DCT auto 2WD, compact SUV.

New price: £20,155.

Engine/transmission: 1.4 litre, four cylinder, turbo petrol 140 hp, 230 Nm (170 lb.ft) of



torque at 2,250 rpm, six speed twin clutch auto, 2WD.

Performance: 118 mph, 0-62 mph 9.9 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 49.6 mpg (35.7 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 133 g/km, VED £205/£140, BiK company car tax 27%.
Insurance Group: 11.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,248 mm (13.94 ft), W 1,796 mm (5.89 ft), H 1,608 mm (5.28 ft), boot/load space 350 to 1,000 litres (12.36 to 35.31 litres), five doors/four to five seats.