Fiat 500 Hybrid – Road Test

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Fiat 500 Lounge Hatchback 1.0 70hp Mild Hybrid

Fiat 500 models are be a classic Italian dish for diners claims road tester Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

The 500 put Fiat back on the road after it was the Cinquecento and it saved the company again with a comprehensive make-over in 2007, since when three-million have been sold. A new refreshed line-up is going on sale Spring 2021, including an all-electric range, but we wanted to catch up with the outgoing series to see just what is the attraction. And it's easy to digest.

While the most modern city cars are growing in size, the Fiat 500 bucks this trend and instead is a compact but capable city car as a hatch or convertible; other 500 family members include the 500X compact SUV and 500L compact MPV. OK the 500 hatch is a compromise between size and subtlety but it really does a good job where it matters and that's in congested city centres demanding sharp responses, nimbleness and good visibility.



Our £14,750 model was fitted with options including rain sensor, rubbing strip, auto climate control, 7-inch touchscreen with 3D nav., Bluetooth, USB and DAB which added £1,600 to the basic price.

Buyers from February will have a new choice of models in the 500 family of hatchbacks and convertibles and Pop, Connect, Dolcevita, Cross and Sport trims powered by petrol 1.0 mild-hybrid and 1.2 engines between £13,270 and £19,150. The 500X SUV 1.0/1.3 petrol models will range from £19, 860 to £26,060 and the 500L MPV 1.4 litre petrol versions from £18,030 to £21,330

Despite being the least powerful engine in the range, the sub – 1.0 litre triple-pot power plant with mild hybrid assist produced a lively if noisy performance in my 500 Hatch with Lounge spec and meant I had to be swift with the stick to stir it along in town traffic. That was no problem with a very light, smooth clutch and effortless, flick of wrist six-speed gearbox and lever.



Bare figures can be misleading as the Fiat 500 Lounge actually kept up very well with traffic

in busy streets, but it was a little wanting when moving across country roads and it struggled on slopes or with a few people aboard.

The engine worked hard and did what was expected but it let you know it was there with a throbbing note which changed to a busy hum and then more raucous revs as the load increased.



A light throttle was tempered by strong brakes and a good parking brake. The steering was adjustable for city or country driving, and height, and its ratio made it easy to handle in

town or when parking, particularly in tight spaces which could be attempted without any trouble thanks to the excellent all round vision from the driver's seat. Front wipers were good but not exceptional and the lights lacked range, however.

The steering feedback encouraged you to make the most of the little 500's grip and turning circle, it was light and behaved without any real vices but it did not like cross-winds and there was some body roll on bends.

Being designed in the noughties, the Fiat 500 is not a very roomy family car. It takes two well but is a tight fit for four in its three-door body and the bootspace is really suitable only for a few shopping bags or sports bags.

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However, those in front do enjoy good seats and a surprisingly comfortable ride for a car with a 2.30 m (7.55 ft) wheelbase. It coped well with most surfaces but really bad potholed stretches tested the springs and shock absorbers and you could hear the suspension working away, occasionally banging through the system to jar occupants.

Inside, the cabin is ideal for an average sized driver to reach everything. Most controls are on the steering wheel spokes or on three stalks around the column and they all worked well, with additional switches on the centre console.

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Simple instruments in front of the driver were sparsely calibrated but fairly clear and a useful multi-function display was included.

Our car had the optional larger infotainment, comms and navigation screen but it was not state of art and looked a bit dated as well as being slow to respond to inputs. Climate control was good and effective in the small cabin but it was slow to clear morning misting on the windows. It did, however, fill the compartment with warm air fairly quickly.

Apart from the engine note under load and some road rumbles over bad surfaces, the noise levels were muted and driven with restraint on good tarmac it was quiet. What I did enjoy was seeing the fuel consumption staying north of 50 mpg even when driven briskly and this must be down to engine efficiency combined with good gear ratios.

VERDICT

I can understand the appeal of the Fiat 500; it was always a good car and seemed out of step with more modern rivals but it's also highly distinctive in a sector where everything can look identical and impersonal.

For: Economical, nimble, easy to drive and park, excellent visibility, good controls.

Against: Modest performance, limited rear seat and boot space, busy engine note under load, roadholding affected by crosswinds, basic trim, ungenerous warranty.



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

Fiat 500 Lounge Hatchback 1.0 mild hybrid city car.



Price: £16,350 inc options.

Mechanical: 70 hp 999cc 3-cylinder petrol engine with mild hybrid assist, 6-speed manual gearbox.

Performance: 104 mph, 0 – 62mph 13.8 seconds, Combined MPG 52, CO2 emissions 119 g/km.

Tax costs: VED First Year road tax £175, Standard rate £150, BiK company car tax 16%.

Insurance Group: 13.

Warranty: 3 years/60,000 miles.

Size: L 3.58 m (11.75 ft), W 1.63 m (5.35 ft), H 1.49 m (4.89 ft).

Bootspace: 185 – 550 litres (6.53 – 19.42 cu.ft).