Fiat 500 X – Road Test

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Aiming to cash in on the appeal of the retro-styled 500 with the practicality of a compact SUV, Fiat's 500X has plenty going for it.

Kim Henson samples the turbocharged four cylinder petrol-powered 1.3 T4 DDCT Cross Plus version.

(All words and photographs by Kim).

When Fiat introduced the 'modern' 500 in 2007, the company pulled a masterstroke in applying appealing retro styling to the newcomer, and the car has been popular with buyers ever since. Nowadays the range includes a variety of different variants, including hybrid, convertible, MPV (500L) and SUV versions – which is where the 500X comes in…

The five door 500X was launched in 2014 and dubbed ‘the original Italian Crossover’, providing much more room for passengers and luggage than the diminutive three door 500.

The 500X was revised for 2019, notable changes including refreshed exterior styling, new LED lamp units (said to be energy-saving and longer-lasting), also improved, Euro 6D-compliant direct injection turbocharged petrol engines (with a Gasoline Particle Filter or GPF) plus the adoption of an automatic transmission option. Diesel power units and four wheel drive no longer offered (sales of such versions had been low in number). All 500X models are now front wheel drive only. The latest engines are said by Fiat to be faster in acceleration and quieter than their predecessors.

Under the Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) partnership, the 500X shares much of its DNA (and main ‘platform’) with the Jeep Renegade; both are built in Melfi, Italy.

Available models in the UK are Urban (prices start at £18,810), Lounge (£20,010 upwards), City Cross (also from £20,010), Cross Plus (base figure £21,810) and Sport (from £22,810).



The subject for this road test is the Cross Plus variant, said by Fiat to be ‘The SUV equipped for your next adventure’. It certainly has a comprehensive list of standard fittings which, among many other items including a raft of safety systems and an Electronic Stability Programme, features 19 inch aluminium alloy sports road wheels, Lane Assist with Intelligent Speed Assist and Traffic Sign Recognition, Adaptive Cruise Control, Blind Spot Detection and Rear Cross Path Detection, Dusk sensors, a rear parking sensor and a ‘Parkview’ rear parking camera. Further exterior niceties include roof rails, body-coloured electrically-adjustable heated door mirrors and dark-tinted rear windows.

I need to mention that one observer said that she liked the appearance of the car, and

commented that the prominent headlamp units looked very much like ‘eyes’… She is correct of course!



The inside story includes automatic dual zone climate control air conditioning, front and rear electrically-operated windows, a height-adjustable driver’s seat, a central front armrest above a useful storage compartment, and 60/40 split folding rear seats.

Connectivity is state of the art, with Fiat’s ‘Uconnect’ ‘Live Services’ set-up and the centrally-located seven inch touch screen offering Bluetooth hands-free use, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto Connectivity, audio streaming, text reader and voice recognition function and 3D Navigation – and there are controls on the steering wheel, in addition to those available via the seven inch touch screen. This also provides (for example) trip

computer readouts for fuel consumption and range.

Thankfully, for convenience and safety, many of the controls, for example those serving the heating/air conditioning system and audio system volume, etc, can be operated without having to resort to working through menus accessible via the touch screen.

There are also aux-in plus USB ports (including one in the rear of the car).

Engine choices for the 500X are between a three cylinder 1.0 litre FireFly Turbo unit, developing 120 hp and mated to a six speed manual gearbox, or a four cylinder 1.3 litre Firefly Turbo motor, producing 150 hp and driving via a six speed DCT twin clutch automatic transmission (as fitted to my test car). Fiat's Start&Stop system cuts the engine when the car comes to a halt, to save fuel and emissions in urban running.



The parking brake is electronically-activated via a switch in the centre console, but a ‘hillholder’ function is incorporated, and when driving away from standstill the parking brake automatically releases without the need for driver intervention.

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS

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I – and all my passengers – thought that the interior treatment in the test car was very smart, including the painted dash sections, reminiscent of the original 500 of decades past, and the upholstery looked and felt comfortable and durable.

The front seats were very accommodating and comfortable too, with the height-adjustable driver's seat also affording an excellent view of the road ahead and to each side of the car. Visibility to the rear was less impressive, due to the substantial rear body pillars, although the rear parking sensors and rear parking camera helped a great deal.

I was surprised at how relatively little rear seat leg room was available, even with the front seats set approximately mid-way along their runners. Having said that, headroom was fine in the front and rear seats.

Storage spaces within the car include open compartments within the front and rear doors, a lidded glovebox and a useful 'box' in the centre console, and this is also fitted with a hinged lid. In addition there are two cup holders in the centre console, plus an open storage compartment ahead of the gear selector lever.

Our test car also featured an additional useful storage unit attached to the back of the front passenger seat, and a neat coat hanger mounted on the back of the driver's seat.

The boot is wide, deep and quite long from front to back, and with the 'false' boot floor lifted, there's an additional sizeable and hidden compartment beneath the main boot. When required, the 'false' floor can be lifted out to provide height for taller loads. Sadly though, there is no spare wheel.

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DRIVING



I was very impressed by the smoothness, refinement, power and torque provided by the 1.3 litre four cylinder engine, aided by the slick-changing six speed automatic transmission. Cruising speeds were quickly reached, with brisk acceleration available from rest and 'on the move'.

I should add that when desired, the gearshift lever can be moved from normal 'Drive' mode to enable manual selection of the ratios. By simply shifting the lever to the left, it can then be used to select/hold the appropriate gear. However, in most circumstances during my week with the car, I found it best to let the auto transmission make its own decisions!

At high road speeds progress was hushed, and with the tachometer registering just 2,500 rpm at 70 mph.

The ride quality was admirable too; really very good indeed, with the car taking smooth and rough road surfaces in its stride and without unsettling the occupants. This was very welcome and seemed not to be at the expense of handling/roadholding; both enjoyable and reassuring on twisting cross-country routes.

I found the electrically-operated power-assisted steering to be nicely-weighted at all speeds, and not over-sensitive on fast, straight roads, even in windy conditions.

Effective lights, screenwashers and screenwipers endeared themselves to me during the dark, wet weather that predominated during the time I was using the car.

The instrumentation was clear, and I especially liked the large digital speed display immediately ahead of the driver (in addition to a normal speedometer). No excuses for not knowing speed of progress – and helped by the standard-fit traffic sign recognition programme.



The centrally-located touch screen worked well, once the menus were mastered, and, for example, the trip computer can be set to display current and overall fuel consumption since the tripmeter (there are two) was last zeroed, as well as the remaining mileage range on the fuel in the tank.

I should also mention the high quality sound provided by the audio system; very enjoyable and far better than many.

FUEL CONSUMPTION?

The WLTP official ‘Combined’ fuel consumption figure for our test 500X is 40.9 mpg.

My week-long test drive covered a wide variety of driving conditions, including town running, in which consumption averaged about 29 mpg.

However, mixed town, country and long-distance motoring boosted the overall average figure, as recorded by the car's on-board computer, to 38.1 mpg, so not too far off the official figure.



VERDICT

Having driven, and enjoyed, various versions since the 'modern' era of 500s arrived in 2007, and including the previous 500X, I thought that the latest variant was a very worthy machine. Probably inevitably, as it is much larger, it lacks the sheer 'cuteness' appeal of the basic 500, but offers more in many other ways.

With the exception of the fairly limited rear seat leg room already referred to, I found it to be a very practical family car, also fun to drive and comfortable.

In fact it exceeded my expectations in many respects, notably in the performance and refinement offered by the smooth-running and eager-to-deliver engine/transmission set-up.

With a price tag that is very reasonable in today’s context, I feel that the 500X as tested represents a great deal of motor car for hard-earned cash.


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WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC IN BRIEF:

Fiat 500X Cross Plus, 1.3 Firefly 150 hp.

Engine: Euro 6D-compliant 1.3 litre four cylinder, in-line turbocharged petrol (with Gasoline Particulate Filter or GPF).

Transmission: Six speed twin clutch automatic transmission, front wheel drive.

Power: 150 hp @ 5,500 rpm.

Max. Torque: 270 Nm (199 lb.ft) at 1,850 rpm.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 9.1 seconds.

Top speed: 124 mph.

Fuel consumption:

Official WLTP figure: Combined, 40.9 mpg.

Achieved during our Wheels-Alive test, over 291 miles, average 38.1 mpg.

Estimated mileage range on a full tank (48 litres or 10.56 Imperial gallons), at our actual achieved mpg: Approximately 402 miles.

CO2 Emissions: 139 g/km.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited mileage (body corrosion warranty, eight years).

Insurance Group: 16.

Euro NCAP rating: 5*.

Dimensions:

Length 4,269 mm (14.01 ft), Width (including mirrors) 2,025 mm (6.64 ft), Width (excluding mirrors) 1796 mm (5.89 ft), Height (including roof bars) 1,603 mm (5.26 ft), wheelbase 2,570 mm (8.43 ft).

Luggage capacity: 350 to 1,000 litres (12.36 to 35.31cu.ft).

Braked towing weight 1,200 kg (2,646,lb).

Four doors, five seats.

Price (‘On the Road’): From £21,810.