Revised Fiat 500X – Road Test

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UPDATED FIAT 500X – FASHION AND FUNCTION COMBINED.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

With the on-going arrival of all-new SUVs of all sizes in full swing, the popular market sector

also offers updated versions of SUVs which have been available for much longer.

At the compact end of the SUV market one such revised and refreshed model range made its UK debut at the end of last year. This was the refreshed five-door compact Fiat 500X, termed the original Italian Crossover. Although a compact SUV it is one of the largest models in the popular Fiat 500 family, which includes hatchback and convertible city cars, the 500X compact SUV and the 500L small MPV.

The revised 2019 model year 500X has tweaks to its exterior styling, revised engines and an auto transmission, with deletion of 4WD and diesel versions due to low sales. But one thing is constant – it's still got that muscular image, some would say bloated, but let's be reasonable and say chunky. Most noticeable exterior changes are the new LED daytime running lights, LED headlights and rear light units.

It has two body styles which are self explanatory – Urban and Cross but all are front wheel drive. There are now four trim and equipment levels – Urban, City Cross, Cross Plus and recently added S-Design. But even newer are "120th special edition versions of the 500, 500X and 500L to be revealed at the Geneva Motor Show this coming week to celebrate the brand's 120 year history.

Which spec depends on the engine chosen, and prices start from £16,995 and range up to £23,195. As most new car buying retail customers for any brand select a PCP finance purchase offer, the Fiat 500X range with a 48-month contract starts at £159 per month for the lowest price model and rises to £239 a month for the top spec version.

The engine options, depending on body style and spec level, are a 1.6 litre, four cylinder, 110 hp normally aspirated e-TorQ petrol unit with a five speed manual gearbox, and two new 'FireFly' turbocharged EU 6.2 compliant direct injection petrol units; the 1.0 litre three cylinder 120 hp with a six speed manual gearbox and a 1.3 litre four cylinder 150 hp unit, matched with a six speed dual clutch automatic gearbox.

Whichever engine is chosen and whatever body style and spec level is opted for will depend

on a customer's requirements and of course affordability. The major thing the 500X has going for it is its distinctive styling; it won't be to everybody's choice but at least it is different from the plethora of similar sized compact SUV on sale. Personalisation options have played a major part in the popularity of the 500X which has accumulated over 1.5 million global sales.

Comments passed to me during my driving spell ranged from 'ugly' to 'interesting'; there is no question the 500X does divide opinions. Fiat see it appealing to younger buyers, perhaps the family second car but its compact size doesn't fit happily with school-run duties. Most likely, and from those users I've seen, it's likely the 'young at heart' empty nesters will enjoy the 500X most as an alternative to the ageing Nissan Juke or perhaps the Vauxhall Mokka, Peugeot 2008 and MINI Countryman. I see numerous older couples in my locality with the Mokka – they like the price, compact size for parking, low running costs and the higher ground clearance which makes getting in and out of the vehicle easier.

To that end the Fiat 500X unique fashionable styling, a huge array of personalisation options and compact SUV functionality at reasonable prices could be appealing to those fancying a change.



The top of the range Cross Plus 1.3 150 hp automatic (priced at £23,195) I tried will suit a wide range of customers but only if they don't deem 4WD a necessity and some competitors still offer this function. Of course being the modern-way there are numerous extra cost options which can be added and my test car had loads of them, pushing the price up to £25,780 and at that price we are into a much larger choice of roomier medium sized SUVs, so it's buyer beware when it comes to selecting which version suits your requirements and pocket.

Getting inside the latest 500X, whilst the styling is familiar to the past models, there are

detailed changes with more technology, better ergonomics and a general refreshed environment. The fascia has a coloured facing panel matched to the exterior paintwork running more or less the full width with the usual central touchscreen. The quality and fit of the trim and upholstery looks to have improved with soft-touch elements. Traffic Sign Recognition, Intelligent Speed Assist and Lane Assist driving assist systems are standard on all versions, as are the latest in-car connectivity, with Uconnect 7-inch HD LIVE touchscreen with DAB radio, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay integration and Android Auto compatibility. Separate from the touchscreen functions are easy to use heating and ventilation controls together with dual-zone automatic air-con. Also included with the Cross Plus spec are cruise control, multi-function leather bound steering wheel, 60/40 split folding rear seat backs, remote central locking, electric heated and adjustable door mirrors, Start & Stop, rear parking sensors and a rear view mirror. This spec level also adds the exterior 18-inch alloy wheels, Cross Plus spec all-road bumpers with protective inserts, and front fog lights with cornering function. However if you want leather upholstery that costs an extra £850; front parking sensors are priced at £300 plus £950 for an electric sunroof and £650 for the Active Safety Pack which should be a standard item. Even a space saver spare wheel sets you back another £100 – otherwise you get an inflation kit.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

The chunky looking 500X uses the platform from the Jeep Renegade SUV, another member of the Fiat Chrysler Automobiles family. But in the latest changes to the range 4WD models have been deleted as have diesel models due to low sales. The 1.3 litre, four cylinder direct injection turbocharged petrol engine is one of two new ‘FireFly’ generation units introduced to comply with the new EU 6.2 regulations. Like its predecessor petrol units it’s a free-revving engine, eager to please and with 270 Nm (199 lb.ft) of torque from 1,850 rpm it proved to be responsive and well suited to its partnership as standard with the new six speed dual-clutch auto gearbox. There is no need to keep the engine in its relatively high rpm powerband, the auto box does that for the driver so the flexibility moving from low to medium to higher speeds is good, although not always seamless. On a few occasions there was some indecision as to what gear was needed, mainly between second and third gears,

especially after first starts on a cold day. But overall the new engine and auto box proved to be a nice combination to drive.



As for performance top speed is a healthy 124 mph and zero to 62mph takes just 9.1 seconds. The Combined Cycle official fuel consumption figure is 43.5 mpg and during my week of driving, covering local roads to motorway journeys the real-life figure was 36.5 mpg, not very close to the official figure but probably realistic. With CO2 emissions of 146 g/km First Year VED road tax costs £205 and then £140 for year two onwards. From April this year VED rates change so the cost will be £210 and £145. Company car drivers will pay 30% Benefit-in-Kind tax now and 33% from April which is high. Insurance is Group 16 and

the warranty is three years unlimited mileage.

The ride comfort, even with the larger 18-inch wheels, was good, with only the worst of the potholes transmitting a thump into the passenger compartment. The handling was neat and nimble given its relatively tall height, and it was easy to park due to its compact length and good visibility.

VERDICT

For those people wanting a fashionable compact SUV, that's just a bit different with its retro styling, it meets that need. Despite its relatively small size, with the responsive new 1.3 litre petrol engine there are no drawbacks once it comes to high speed open road cruising. Yes it will be an acquired taste but sometimes it pays to be different.

For: Unique and appealing, for some customers, retro styling in its class, wide range of personalisation options, new lively petrol engine option, neat and nimble handling, comfortable, easy to park.

Against: Some jerky auto gear changes, no 4WD or diesel models in the revised range, limited rear seat space and legroom, high company car tax costs for a small vehicle, loads of extra cost and personalisation options – but at considerable costs.



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

2019 Fiat 500X Cross Plus, 1.3 FireFly 150 hp automatic, compact SUV.

Price: £23,195 (£25,780 as tested with options).

Engine/transmission: 1.3 litre, 150 hp; 270 Nm (199 lb.ft) torque, four cylinder, direct injection turbocharged petrol, EU 6.2 compliant, six speed dual clutch automatic,

2WD.

Performance: 124 mph, 0–62 mph 9.1 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 43.5 mpg (36.5 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 146 g/km, VED £205/£140, BiK company car tax 30%. Insurance Group: 16.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,269 mm (14.01 ft), W 1,796 mm (5.89 ft), H 1,603 mm (5.26 ft), wheelbase 2,570 mm (8.43 ft), boot/load space 350 to 1,000 litres (12.36 to 35.31 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,200 kg (2,646 lb), five doors; four/five seats.