

FIAT 124 SPIDER

By Jim Mc Cauley

Within the affordable end of the Fiat empire, the title company has trailed behind Alfa Romeo in getting sporting desirables to market with the exception of the Abarth versions of their mainstream 500 range.

But now things have changed with the arrival of the 124 Spider, which takes more than its name



from the elegant original model of some 50 years ago. The Spider of yesteryear was penned by Pininfarina and the in-house styling of the new model draws heavily on the lines of the original with its twin bonnet bulges, flowing waist line and pouting grille.

Underneath, the starting point was not Fiat's, but a chassis wisely chosen from partner Mazda's MX-5 who also provided most of the cabin detailing. The rest is Fiat with their well proven 1.4 litre turbo engine up front outputting 140hp which nestles comfortably between the two options in the Mazda line-up.

Dedicated Fiat bodywork is larger and more seductive than that of the MX-5, and once behind the wheel there is no mistaking the Italian touch.

Weighing in at 1050kg, the enthusiastic turbo unit takes the Spider from rest to 62 mph in 7.5 seconds with a potential top speed of 134mph. You know the engine's working as the turbo announces its involvement but it is a sporting mechanical note that encourages you to press on with the right foot and squeeze more enjoyment from its 1.4 litres.

The standard short-throw manual gearbox steps through the gears with precision and there is a confidence in the power delivery to the rear wheels that adds to the appeal of the car. Steering is precise with excellent turn-in and the car holds square through corners with the higher spec'ed test car sitting on 17-inch rims.





With the top raised, cabin is well insulated by the half-lined hood which forsakes electrical assistance in its one-touch manual fold. The solid front panel provides the locking cover when it is stored and the operation, up or down, is only a matter of a few seconds.

While the cabin draws on the Mazda lay-out, Fiat has added its own touches in terms of fabrics, seat choices and specific detailing. The slightly larger body also provides a larger boot while there is a more modern interpretation of the rear light clusters.

Initially it was rumoured that the liaison with Mazda would be for an Alfa Romeo two-seater, but possibly it was considered that an Alfa should only have pure Italian provenance. However, the decision to share chassis expertise and go separate ways in terms of power units and suspension detailing has paid dividends in the quality of handling, and there is no mistaking the Italian DNA of the final product. In addition, the final benefit of the shared engineering is the reduction in production costs and ultimately selling price.

In the UK, the Fiat 124 Spider is available in three trim levels with the standard 'Classico' specification entering the market at just under £20,000. Mid range 'Lusso' gains 17-inch alloys, stainless steel windscreen surround and keyless entry as well as navigation and interior upgrades. The range topping 'Lusso Plus' adds to the previous trim level with LED headlights, adaptive front lighting system, automatic lights and wipers, and upgraded BOSE sound system.

The car has an official combined fuel consumption of 44.1 mpg and with a CO2 emissions of 148gms/km is in Band F for annual road tax. The range topping 'Lusso Plus' model tested is listed at £23,295 and all variants are covered by Fiat's comprehensive three year warranty.



(Driven September 2016)