

FIAT 500 TWIN AIR

By Jim Mc Cauley

It's very much a case of back to the future for Fiat, adding a twin cylinder power unit to their recreation of the iconic 500 from the 1950s. The engine may still be in the opposite end compared to the original, but a two-cylinder power unit brings the modern interpretation closer to its roots.



While the original 500cc unit produced a heady 13 bhp, the new twin-cylinder engine displaces 875ccs and produces 85 bhp. To put it into perspective, the Twin Air delivers 23 per cent more power but with a 15 per cent reduction in CO2 emissions than the 1.2 litre 4-cylinder version that is to date the best seller in the range. The test vehicle was finished in a bright blue special paint that is a £260 extra and adds to the youthful appeal of the car, complemented by the light grey and cream interior.

Fire up the engine and the raucous revs take you right to the rev limiter as the turbo assistance feeds the engine's needs. Secure on smooth roads, irregular surfaces can upset its composure, but the car maintains its charm, providing an entertaining drive throughout. A retro cabin, meticulously detailed, adds to the car's appeal.

Accommodation-wise, as with all small cars, the priority is for the front seat occupants who are well catered for, although the driver lacks the benefit of reach adjustment on the steering column which has rake only positioning. Rear accommodation is for two people only and could be endured for short journeys. A small boot completes the packaging and thankfully houses a space-saver spare wheel underneath, rather than the virtually useless puncture repair kit increasingly favoured by other manufacturers.





The engine is the significant element of the car, having a 2010 International Engine of the Year Award to its credit, offering not only acceptable performance for its capacity (0-62 mph in 11 seconds with a potential top speed of 108 mph), but also low emissions. With a CO2 emissions of just 95 gms/km it is exempt road tax, and features additional elements aimed at stretching economy. These include standard stop/go auto starting in traffic, an Eco mode option and an instrument panel prompt advising when to change gear. However, in mixed driving the claimed official figure of 68.9 mpg was far off my experience on local roads where the best I could do was nudge 50 mpg,

Equipment-wise, the car is again a radical departure from the austere layout of the original, and equipment levels put many larger cars to shame. Standard safety provision includes anti-lock brakes with Electronic Brakeforce Distribution and seven airbags, while air conditioning, fixed glass sunroof, remote central locking, electric windows, leather steering wheel and 'Blue and Me' infotainment system are all standard. This award winning system allows drivers to operate their music and phone from the steering wheel controls or by voice activation and has extended features with the optional slot-in satellite navigation system.

Overall, the 500 Twin Air combines the charm of the model range, with the gusto of the twin cylinder engine demonstrating many of the benefits of downsizing. The car is listed at £12,000 and is in Group 12 of the 50 category listing for insurance purposes.

