

FIAT 500C TWIN AIR

By Jim Mc Cauley



Eight years on and over 1.5 million sales, Fiat has introduced an updated version of its iconic 500 model with new exterior styling detailing, enhanced cabin comfort and improved efficiency. While it bears a close resemblance to its predecessor, there are no fewer than 1,800 changes to the 2016 model to enhance its personality and continue its appeal.

Power source in the test car is the award winning TwinAir unit in the higher 105 bhp output. This twin cylinder turbocharged engine of 0.9 litres is noticeably more refined than the original and also more flexible in terms of

power delivery. Driving through its standard 6-speed manual gearbox, the car reaches 62 mph from rest in a mere 10 seconds with the potential to top 117 mph.

On road, and the car feels solid and secure with direct steering and reassuring brakes, all adding to the confidence of the drive. Controls are nicely balanced for the size of the car and the power delivery from such a small capacity engine is impressive. A range of electronic handling packages add to the confidence of the car and these include Electronic Stability Control, Hill Holder Function and Hydraulic Brake Assistance which helps to maintain control in emergency stops.

While the standard 500 is a solid roof hatchback model, the test car was the convertible derivative, offering the option of open air motoring from its full length powered fabric roof. This has the advantage of being the central roof section with the side panels remaining part of the steel bodywork contributing to the car's sturdy feel and offering occupant protection with the roof opened. The power operation offers full retraction or automatic half-way operation at the touch of a switch while a heated glass rear window is standard.

Accommodation-wise, as with all small cars, the priority is for the front seat occupants who are well catered for while rear accommodation is better than in many superminis and is adequate for two adults. A useful 182 litre boot completes the packaging and houses a space-saver spare wheel underneath.

The engine is the significant element of the car, having a 2010 International Engine of the Year Award to its credit, offering not only excellent performance for its capacity but also low emissions. With a CO2 emissions of just 99 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. In several days mixed driving and with no effort to chase the economy benefits of the engine I was able to average over 50 mpg. More restrained use could push the figure well beyond this and towards the official combined fuel consumption figure of 67.3 mpg.



Standard safety provision includes seven airbags (twin front, side, curtain and driver's knee), while air conditioning, remote central locking, electric windows, leather steering wheel and reversing sensors are just some of the features of a comprehensive equipment list.

Overall, the 500C 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 in top 'Lounge' specification is listed from £17,070 and is in Group 18 of the 50-category listing for insurance purposes. Available extras include metallic paint at £ 460, 16-inch alloys at £180 and DAB radio with TomTom navigation at £350. Like all Fiats, the model is covered by the company's 3-year / 60,000 mile warranty with Province-wide dealer coverage. The Donnelly Group has been awarded the exclusive Northern Ireland franchise for Fiat cars and commercials, with their four dealerships in Belfast, Dungannon, Enniskillen and Campsie providing for the first time here total coverage for the Italian marque.