



Fiat 500 Hatchback full review

Performance

The 500 is available with a choice of three engines, two petrols - a 1.2 or 1.4-litre - or a 1.3-litre diesel, all borrowed from Fiat's supermini sibling, the Panda. None will set pulses racing, not as much as the looks anyway, but the 100bhp 1.4-litre petrol feels lively around town, if a little slow off the mark. The dashboard-mounted gearstick is well placed, but the gearshift action could be slicker.

Ride & Handling

No surprises to learn the 500 is at its best when picking its way through traffic on crowded city streets. This is thanks to its small dimensions and easy steering. Break away from the hustle and bustle of the city, though, and the 500 doesn't sparkle. The handling isn't great and the ride feels jittery, whatever your speed.

Refinement

Living with the 500 on a day-to-day basis shouldn't prove too tiresome. The diesel is a little noisy at low speeds, but it settles down at pace. Wind- and road noise become more evident as speeds increase, but noise never gets to an irritating level. It isn't the most refined supermini, but it's certainly not the worst.

Buying & Owning

The 500 seems a solid buying proposition. It is cheaper to buy than its rivals and its cute looks and retro styling add to its desirability. This desirability will mean solid residual values, though. We reckon the 500 will maintain just over half of its list price after three years – not bad for a supermini.

Quality & Reliability

Most of the plastics and fabrics used in the interior fit with the retro image of the 500, and it looks great and feels sturdy enough. Time will tell as to how well it fares with regards to reliability. However, the engines - borrowed from the Panda - have so far proved trouble free.

Safety & Security

Safety in the 500 is first rate. All models come with front, side, curtain and knee airbags, which has helped it receive a five-star rating in Euro NCAP crash tests. Some versions of the 500 also feature driver aids like traction and stability control to help keep you on the straight and level.

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Behind The Wheel

The steering wheel has no reach adjustment, but the seat height adjusts to help you get comfortable. The simple design of the dash means it's easier to use than a knife and fork, and it has all the style you could ask for. However, look lower down the cabin and traces of plain Fiat Panda switchgear begin to tarnish the retro illusion. You can personalise your 500 interior with a variety of different colour and styling combinations.



Space & Practicality

The classic 500 was renowned for its compact dimensions, and much is the same with this modern take. Those in the front will travel in comfort, but it doesn't have as much rear-seat space as its obvious rival, the Mini. The 500 has the bigger boot of the pair, though, and the split rear seats fold down easily to improve luggage space.



Equipment

Standard equipment on Pop includes driver, passenger, side and driver's knee airbags, a CD/MP3 stereo, power steering, electric mirrors and colour-coded bumpers. Stability control, a sunroof, metallic paint and parking sensors are available as options. It's a shame, though, that you have to step up a level to get air-conditioning.

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