

MOTERING FOCUS: FIAT 500 1.3 MULTIJET LOUNGE

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WHAT A cute car. The Fiat 500 is funky, fashionable and nimble. In fact it's the perfect motor for nipping around town in and, with a decent turbo diesel under the bonnet, it's just as good on longer motorway trips.

I did feel slightly annoyed when I first climbed into the Fiat and slammed my left knee against the centre console, but I'm a 6ft tall chap and it's a small car. What did I expect? Well, I didn't anticipate it to be so lush inside – that's for sure. The white leather steering wheel, comfortable seats, and body coloured dash trim soon made me forget about my aching knee. In fact I completely forgave the Fiat 500 for causing me pain once I started her up.

The diminutive Italian car's 1.3 16v Multijet engine packs a punch. It takes the 500 from a standing start rapidly - if you want it to - and makes cruising at 70 mph a pleasure. Mated to this engine, the Fiat is also seriously economical. It features a Stop and Start system, which further reduces fuel consumption by switching the engine off when you're stationary and not in gear – helping to give a mega-mpg of up to 72.4.

The ride can be a little too firm over bumpy road surfaces and this causes handling to become slightly jittery, but other than that the Fiat 500 does a great job. It's actually more practical than I thought it would be too. The boot managed to take the family shopping, and my wife and two little children sat quite happily as my passengers when we went on a few school and nursery runs together.

Reassuringly, the Fiat has a maximum 5-star rating in the gruelling Euro NCAP crash test safety programme. When it achieved this, it was the first time that a car of such compact dimensions, (3.5 metres in length), had achieved a top rating, and astonishing that a vehicle of its type had been equipped with seven airbags as standard.



In fact, the Fiat 500 offers general levels of equipment more usually associated with cars of a far higher segment, with ABS anti-lock braking, remote central locking, electric front windows and door mirrors, an MP3-compatible CD player and electric power steering. In Lounge spec, on test here, the car also has mobile phone connectivity, air conditioning, 15 inch alloy wheels, exterior chrome trim, a glass roof and a very useful 50:50 split/folding rear seat with head restraints.

What's more, the Fiat 500 personalisation programme offers a range of over 100 bespoke accessories which, generating more than 500,000 possible trim, colour and option combinations, gives you the opportunity to personalise the Fiat in ways you never thought possible!

PROS 'N' CONS

- Fashionable ✓
- Economical ✓
- Equipment levels ✓
- Safety ✓
- Firm ride ✗

FAST FACTS

- Max speed: 112 mph
- 0-62 mph: 10.7 secs
- Combined mpg: 72.4
- Engine: 1248 cc 4 cylinder 16v turbo diesel
- Max. power (bhp): 95 at 4000 rpm
- Max. torque (lb/ft): 148 at 1500 rpm
- CO₂: 104 g/km
- Price: £13,760 on the road