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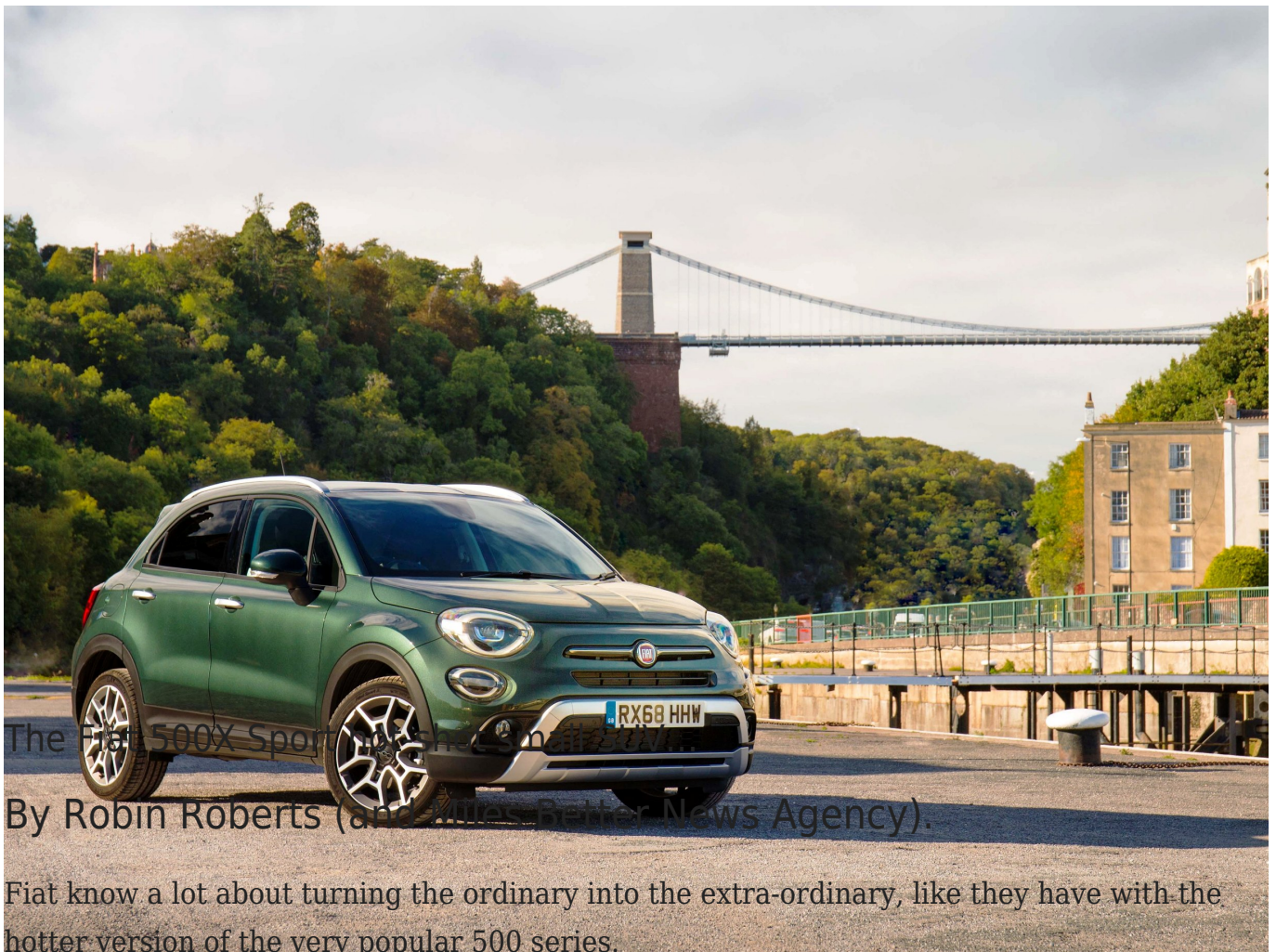
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Fiat 500X Sport SUV – Road Test

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Their best selling city car for some 60 years, the Fiat 500 range has been boosted by the X Sport small SUV given a beefier 150 bhp 1.3 litre four-cylinder engine in the top model we tested, and married as standard to a silky six-speed automatic transmission with paddle changes on the column.



If you've had a good breakfast you can zip along and make your own gearchanges, but after a leisurely Italian-style lunch the Fiat 500X autobox can do the work for you.

The 1.3 litre engine is a stalwart of the brand and found in many models but in the little 500 it packs a stronger punch even if the pain comes along in the way of higher road tax when you buy it.

It's been with us for a while and is not the greenest of engines either, emitting 156 g/km which means a hefty 34% BIK penalty for a business user. In reality I think not many business drivers would choose the Fiat 500X but instead its appeal lies with the retail buyer and families.





They would probably be happy with the fuel economy of over 40 mpg average and possibly higher with some light footwork on the right pedal, and less use of the big brake pedal next to it.



Start-up and it is eager to go, automatic changes come quickly and smoothly and you are rarely left wanting a gear for any overtaking, but you need to plan your moves and possibly select the lever's manual side or work the paddles if you want to make the quickest progress. It's not particularly fast but it can easily keep up with traffic and it settles down to a relaxed and comfortable gait on main roads and motorways.



The Fiat 500X has been given a warm upgrade to the steering ratio and suspension so it responds better to turning, and roadholding improves without making the ride too hard. It produces a lot more road noise with optional 19-inch sports tyres and sometimes the bumps in the road are felt inside, but it never made us feel unsafe and hung on determinedly.

Standard equipment included DAB radio, Apple and Android connectivity, 3D navigation, start/stop, automatic lights and wipers, 3.5 inches colour screen, cruise control with lane assist and tinted rear windows.

Options on the test car included sport and comfort packs with a space saver spare wheel and adaptive cruise control, totalling £2,800 on top of the standard price of £25,985.

There is also the 1.0 litre Sport Turbo version available with a 120 hp engine and manual gearbox or the 150 hp 1.3 with automatic transmission we have been trying.

The secondary controls cover the steering wheel spokes and fill the column along with the paddle shift levers, a few for the climate control are grouped on the central console with a trio on the lower right of the fascia as well.

In front of the driver, the compact instruments' pod houses speedometer and tachometer, fuel and temperature gauges with a small colour screen between them for a variety of data displays. The main instruments' calibration is not great but is fairly clear and the selectable settings seemed very clear. The simple, clear climate control was easy to use and performed well, with powered windows to back it up but no sunroof.

The main display atop the fascia was a bigger screen for entertainment, 3D navigation, phone and other settings and it was touch-sensitive and very responsive, as well as being sharp and clear in all light conditions.

Oddments room was good with door bins, trays and cubby box in addition to a good-sized glovebox and some well located USB points.



For occupants, access was simple to front or back but once inside those behind might find legroom was short while the front seat occupants had reasonable but not a lot of adjustment range to play with. Head and shoulder room was adequate. Getting into the boot space was easy with remote unlocking and a low floor, a straightforward shape and it came with a space saver spare wheel underneath. Dropping the backs of the rear seats more than doubled the initial space and access was good from the side doors as a result.

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Vision was clear all round with slim roof pillars, deep glass and good automatic wipers front and back, bright long range and wide spread effective automatic headlights, and useful sensors together with a reversing camera - but that was affected by road dirt thrown onto the lens.

In this driver's hands the sportier Fiat 500X was safe and surefooted, with good roadholding and handling characteristics biased towards mild understeer on tight turns and quickly came back on line as the throttle was eased. The retuned steering calibration and Frequency Selective Damping of the shock absorbers have improved handling and grip. Brakes underfoot and the electric parking brake did a good job of effortlessly slowing and holding the car on a regular test hill.



The lowered, sporting suspension has firmed up the ride a bit but not too much and while some bumps could be felt, the seats did an excellent job of absorbing almost all but the worst potholes and raised obstructions. It is measurably improved over the smaller 500 Hatchback.

VERDICT

So, with the Fiat 500X small SUV you seem to get the best of many worlds, a city runabout, family shopping car with a distinctive popular SUV image body kit and a livelier personality for when you can go out and just enjoy a drive over a twisting country road or through the hills and dales of our countryside.



For: Easy to drive, light controls, smooth transmission, strong brakes, good front seats, strong roadholding, well equipped.

Against: Constant road rumbles with occasional bumpiness over some surfaces, engine noise at high revs., small boot with four-up, limited rear legroom, high tax costs.



Mini Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:



Fiat 500X Sport

Price: £25,985 (as tested £28,785 with optional extras).

Mechanical: 1,332cc 4-cylinder, 150 hp turbo-petrol, automatic with 2WD.

Performance: 124 mph, 0 - 62mph 9.1 seconds, Combined cycle 42.2 mpg (41 mpg on test), CO2 emissions 156 g/km.

Tax costs: VED First Year road tax £540, Standard rate £150, BiK company car tax rate 34%.

Insurance Group: 16E.

Warranty: 3 years/unlimited miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4.27 m (14.01 ft), W 1.80 m (5.91 ft), H 1.60 m (5.25 ft),
Boot/load space 350 - 1,000 litres (12.36 - 35.31 cu.ft), 5 doors/5 seats.