

Abarth 500 – the Fiat with a sting in its tail -by Liana Reiners

(23/01/2012)

In the spirit of the legendary 500 Abarth cars of the late Fifties and Sixties, Abarth's first interpretation of the new incarnation of the Fiat 500 has blasted onto the local scene. Combining technology, performance and safety, the 500 Abarth draws on the brand's heritage and experience in the racing arena.



Under the bonnet of the 500 Abarth is a 1,4-litre, 16-valve turbocharged petrol engine that delivers a maximum power output of 99 kW at 5 500 r/min and a torque peak of 206 Nm at 3 000 r/min in sport mode. In normal mode, the torque delivery settles at 180 Nm at 2 500 r/min. Top speed is 205 km/h, while acceleration from 0 to 100 km/h takes 7,9 seconds. Despite its sporty performance, the Abarth remains frugal though, with a fuel consumption figure of 5,4 litres/100 km over a combined cycle.

The 500 Abarth's interior offers further clues to its racing pedigree, thanks to unique Abarth instrumentation and an analogue pressure gauge used to measure the turbo pressure. The pressure gauge contains a gear shift indicator that turns on an LED to encourage the driver to shift gears. The three-spoke steering wheel incorporates moulded grips for the thumbs and is levelled off at the base to ensure increased passenger room and space for adjustment.



The aluminium pedals with rubber inserts also reveal a clear racing vocation, as do the leather-trimmed gear knob and handbrake lever. The seats also feature a special Abarth design, with a wraparound configuration in order to hold the body tightly in position, even when cornering. They can be trimmed in leather, in two black or red specifications, or in two types of cloth.

An additional welcome benefit is the high level of active and passive safety. The jewel in the 500 Abarth's crown is the clever torque transfer control (TTC) system. This is engaged when the TTC button is pressed and mimics a limited slip differential in corners by using the ESP sensors and braking system to transfer the engine's torque away from the unloaded inner wheel to the loaded outer wheel. The result reins in understeer around corners, making the car safer, yet more fun to drive.

The 500 Abarth comes with a high level of passive safety equipment. There are seven airbags as standard and for added safety, optional equipment includes Xenon headlights. The list of standard features includes electric front windows and door mirrors, air-conditioning, a height adjustable driver's seat and steering wheel and a radio/CD/MP3 player with steering wheel controls. The so-called Blue&Me hands-free communication system is also standard.

The 500 Abarth will also be available in cabriolet form. The 500C Abarth shares the same safety features and standard equipment as its hatch counterpart, but boasts an automatically retractable panoramic roof. It also features an optional five-speed Dualogic MTA gearbox. The latter processes a complex set of information on the car's status and the driver's intentions and automates clutch and gear engagement through electro-hydraulic actuators.

The exclusive 500 and 500C Abarth will initially be available from the Abarth Performance Centre in Craighall Park, with specialised technicians on hand at the dedicated facility. Fiat Group Automobiles South Africa offers a three-year 100 000 km Warranty as well as a five-year/90 000 km service plan as standard on both new models.

Pricing:

Abarth 500	R230 000
Abarth 500C	R255 000

