

THE FIAT STRADA ABARTH



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VERDICTS

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THE STRADA WITH THE STING IN ITS TAIL.



In early 1984 we asked a number of top journalists to drive, and appraise, the new Fiat Strada Abarth 130TC. Press leaks prior to its launch indicated an unusually high level of interest: here at last was a high performance hatchback to take on and beat the apparently unassailable Golf GTi. In addition, it carried one of the most coveted badges in motoring: that of Abarth with its distinctive scorpion and red and yellow shield.

1995CC TWIN CAM UNIT 130 BHP AT 5900 RPM

Abarth, of course, have a rich history of success in competition rallying, producing cars that survive some of the most gruelling driving conditions in the world.

Their contribution to the Fiat Strada is very evident in the press comments on the following pages.

What is even more apparent is this: if you want the hottest hatchback on the road today, you'll need to visit your local Fiat dealer – fast!

MOTOR 'Like the best Italian cars, the Abarth 130TC offers excitement and demands to be driven enthusiastically.'

AUTOCAR 'There can be little argument that it is now the leader in terms of performance.'

'For a standard road car, the Strada Abarth 130TC goes round Brands Hatch beautifully. The car feels good at the limit – absolutely competitive in the handling department, and the engine is so noticeably stronger than the competition throughout the rev range.'

AUTOSPORT 'With the new



Strada 130 Abarth, Fiat really do have a performance option. You will know one when you see it disappear into the distance.'

WHAT CAR? 'At last the Golf GTi has a rival that can outstrip it in the performance field.'



'Without doubt the car's biggest selling point is its adoption of the famed Fiat two-litre twin cam engine which endows it with 130bhp at 5900rpm, a good 18bhp better than the Golf delivers at similar revs.

Much of the credit for the development work of the 1995cc power unit goes to the renowned Abarth

All the hallmarks of a great Italian engine are there, particularly the rorty exhaust note that emits the odd crackle and pop, with the car transmitting its power to the road without drama through low-profile Pirellis.

Mid-range acceleration is good, too – every bit a match for the Golf with usefully-spaced gear ratios and a gearchange that, while a little 'rubbery', usually finds its mark quickly and neatly. Never does the engine sound harsh or thrashy, nor even particularly loud, even at high speed.'

'With the right-hand drive



company (actually a wholly-owned Fiat subsidiary) who have equipped the motor with electronic ignition and two twin-choke sidedraught carburettors. In this trim it gives a punchy 130lb ft of torque at 3600rpm.'

'Fiat's two-litre charger proves itself comprehensively quicker as indeed it should with its capacity and power advantage.

To the all-important 60mph mark, 130TC is a good half second faster, clocking in at 7.9 seconds, while by the time 90mph is reached the Italian car is two seconds to the good.

But what perhaps is even more impressive is the way the Strada delivers its message, with a delightfully responsive, crisp engine that begs to be revved hard.

model Fiat have the most fearsome-looking rally bucket seats they could find.

Made by Recaro, they are positively the most aggressive production car seating we have ever seen, and look as if they would be more at home in an out-and-out rally special.

Thick sections clamp the driver in place and allow no sideways movement at all.'

'The fascia layout is good, however, and works well day-to-day. Ventilation is superb, chucking forth more fresh air than any driver could ever possibly need.'

'The Abarth on-paper promise of thrilling acceleration was fully borne out when recently we had the opportunity to drive the car in Scotland.'

TWO TWINCHOKE SIDEDRAUGHT CARBS, 5-SPEED BOX!

FASTLANE 'For many cars the combination of exceptionally testing roads and the high average speeds possible would quickly expose any deficiencies. With the 130TC it simply showed how superbly suited it is to these conditions.'

CARS & CAR CONVERSION

'A manufacturer would have to have something pretty good on offer to get away with a route like this one — let alone have the cars return in one piece, without foamed dampers and shot-up brakes. Well Fiat did, and they have. The Strada Fiat 130TC (it keeps the Abarth badges) goes right to the top of the hot hatch league with no ifs or buts. It goes, it stops and it grips. And I want one.'

'Inside there is a delicious leather covered three spoke Abarth steering wheel (adjustable for rake), full and clear instrumentation including both oil pressure and temperature gauges in the best Italian tradition, and a pair of solid Recaro buckets that you sit *in* rather than on. The pedals are perfectly arranged for heel and toe operation.'

'At higher speeds the 130TC feels glued to the tarmac, fourth gear proving particularly useful during our test drive in order to dispose of the timber trucks which roll through Glencoe at an impressive speed. The brakes of the test car received a fair thrashing during an unscheduled trip along the B-road from the Bridge of Orchy to Dalmally yet never gave a moment's worry. The pedal, if anything, responded better the more that was asked of it.'

CAR 'Unlike all its immediate competitors, this is a no-compromises small car.

The car is aimed more at the

Silverstone set than Sloane Rangers; for those interested in sheer performance rather than fashion.

The Golf GTI and the Strada Abarth 130TC are of course natural rivals. But to be quite blunt about it, we see no level pegging.



In 2,000 miles we found the Fiat Abarth decisively the nicer driver's car. It is sharper and more pleasant to steer, has more straight line performance, has an edge in outright cornering stability, marginally the better brakes, an engine with quicker reflexes, the nicer driving position, better and more supportive seats, a quicker gearchange and a great deal of sporting character.

It is a terrific driver's car. It does set new standards for cars at £7,800.

This, to many, is what makes the Fiat appealing: its single-minded pursuit of high performance gives it real character.

The Abarth's interior is dominated by a pair of Recaro bucket seats with real racing-style sidebolsters to keep their occupants firmly in place against hurricane-force side forces. The seats are covered in an attractive coarse weave fabric. They're mounted high, offer an exceptional degree of rear travel and combined with the height adjustability and Ferrari rake of the Abarth's leather-bound wheel (three alloy spokes and an Abarth boss badge) allow for a superb driving position.

The wheels are good looking with four thick spokes each, driving lights are set next to each headlight in the black grille.

The Fiat Strada Abarth 130TC is the faster car in all departments — in a straight line, around a racing circuit and whenever the two go fast on public roads.

In acceleration, there's rather more between the cars. The Fiat resists wheelspin a little better when accelerating away from standstill in the dry, sings up to 60mph in a shade under 8.0secs, opening out a gap of 0.4secs over the Golf.

The Fiat rushes on through third, into fourth at 100mph. It will



get there just under 24secs, about four mph short of the gear's maximum.

The Abarth engine, whatever it does, feels muscular. The tachometer needle snaps around the dial.



We established that the Fiat was consistently 1.6 to 1.7sec (or at least 50 yards) a lap faster than the Golf.

It showed a superiority at keeping its footing when power was suddenly taken away in mid-corner with the car on the limit. It would tighten up, but there was

none of the Golf's tendency to give a diagonal lurch and even, in extreme cases, poke the tail out.

The Fiat was always the flatter car and surprised us by being the one with markedly the better steering. Not only is the Fiat wheel marginally higher geared, it has considerably sharper responses, yet it is the one with less torque steer. The Golf's helm, good by any other's standards, seems to exhibit classic front-wheel-drive 'fight' compared with the Abarth's. We feel that the initial understeer built into the Fiat may point to its potential for a life on racing slicks.

So it's the Fiat Abarth for mad keen drivers.'



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