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ABARTH 500E v 595

WILD BLUES

FIERY FERRARI TRIO

FIAT STRADA
Group test
LANCIA APPIA
Running report
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OUT WITH A BANG: GHIBLI TROFEO V GIULIA QUADRIFOGLIO









To date, the 130TC is the last car to fully justify having 'Abarth' in its title. In true Abarth tradition it is a real performance version of a regular saloon and not badge engineered. Dismissing fuel injection, the torquey 2-litre twin cam is fed by twin carburettors. Owned by Ali Serpen, this car is currently for sale.

They were prominent Italian hot-hatches of the 1980s, but what do you get for your money today?

It's 1984. George Orwell's predictions have not happened . . . yet. We are out of recession, the feel good factor is err umm... good. The Iron Lady has just taught that beastly tin-pot foreign General a lesson. Investments are rising nicely. Banks are throwing money at us. Debt is dead, credit is born. It's time to spend, spend, spend. Everyone is buying Golf GTIs. Then, in June, Fiat launch the Strada 130TC Abarth. Suddenly the hot-hatch engine-size goal posts are moved. At 2-litres and with 130 bhp the Strada acquired street cred.

Meanwhile (well, early '80s), Lancia had a rust problem with the front subframe mounts of their Beta range. TV consumer programmes like that of Esther Rantzen, grossly exaggerated the problem and Lancia's image in the UK was seriously damaged. Despite this, the Giugiaro designed Delta (introduced 1979) had been evolving admirably. In June 1986, the 1600 HF Turbo acquired fuel injection and was duly promoted with an "i" badge. Both the Delta HF and

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The Lancia Delta was often unkindly referred to as the 'Italian Ford Escort', in reality it combined a very practical body design with brisk, twin cam, performance. This car, owned by Graham Gamson, has optional side strips.

HOT SHOTS

Fiat Strada Abarth and Lancia HF Turbo ie

by Roberto Giordanelli

Strada 130TC are the same size, have similar power outputs and now cost about the same. Which is better? Which would you chose? And what are the pitfalls? Read on.

Fiat first. This is certainly the sportier car. Weighing less than the Lancia is a good starting point. Three doors instead of five, a hard ride and throaty engine makes this the wannabe racer's choice. Many have been raced and rallied, some still are. Surprisingly (for the mid '80s), the engine was not fuel injected. Instead, two twin-choke 40mm carbs feed the trusty 8-valve twin-cam. Together with Magneti Marelli Digiplex electronic ignition, the 130 horse power is delivered at a useful 5,900rpm. There is also an alloy sump, an oil cooler and a stronger clutch. To cope with the stump-pulling 130 lbsft (at 3,600rpm) of torque, a new ZF close-ratio gearbox is standard with a slightly taller final drive ratio. Outwardly - badging apart - alloy wheels, a boot spoiler and fog lamps distinguish it from the cooking versions. Inside, you get huge Recaro competition style seats. Firm, high-sided and with slots for a race harness, they look better than they feel. Look out for wear on the tops of these high sides. They are not very comfortable and access to the rear is hampered. The Abarth leather rimmed alloy steering wheel, the drilled accelerator pedal, the dark trim and sporty dash reinforce the road-racer appeal.

As soon as you start the Abarth 130TC, you can't miss the induction noise from the two twin-choke carbs evoking memories of the 1960s Lotus Cortinas. The ride is hard and pot-holes have you wincing. Handling is very good on smooth surfaces with understeer only in slow corners. Go crazy and it will cock a rear wheel. In the wet, the Abarth will slide before the onset of body-roll. With three and half turns lock to lock the steering is not that quick, neither is it light at parking speeds, but on the move it is just satisfactory. 0-60mph can be achieved in 8 seconds, although it is easy to just sit there wheel spinning if you try too hard. The 0-100mph time of 23.2 seconds gives a better indication of the car's acceleration. Top speed is 121mph and the model was discontinued in 1988 (E-reg).

Many components are common with the thousands of normal Fiat Stradas but just as many are special. Beware of gearbox wear on high milers. They do not stand up to abuse and cost a fortune to replace or repair. As with many of the 130TC's special components, they are very hard to find (contact Abarth specialist: Middle Barton Garage Tel: 01869 340289). 90% of cars were fitted with Solex carbs which were troublesome and rebuild kits are now scarce. Approximately 10% of cars had Webers which usually transforms the running. New Webers are available. These engines are easily tunable and can happily produce 150-160bhp (See Phil Ward's book on Fiat and Lancia Twin Cams). Rust can be a big problem. Check sills, inner rear wings, A and B-posts, windscreen surrounds, doors and wings. Doors and rear wings are very difficult to obtain. Prices start at £1,000 for cars that will require a lot of work and go up to £4,500-5,000 for really mint examples.

On to the Lancia Delta HF Turbo ie - civilised, softer and maybe more sensible. Performance figures are similar, a case of swings and roundabouts. When on boost, the Lancia is quicker than the Fiat. The Delta can also be re-chipped to give 160bhp without much trouble. Caught off-boost, the Fiat will leave it for dead. At the traffic lights Grand Prix there's nothing in it, likewise at top speed.

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HOT SHOTS





Put them on a circuit, however, and the fiery Fiat will easily leave the Lancia languishing. The Lancia has comfy seats, electric windows, softer - but still firm - suspension, five doors and a much quieter ride. More importantly, parts are more plentiful compared to the Strada 130TC. Contact specialists, L & M Lancia in High Wycombe (Tel: 01494 538899) for spares or repairs.

As with the Fiat, the early HF Turbos suffer from heavy steering, although the later ones are much better. With 3.75 turns lock to lock, it is even worse than the Fiat's. A slightly awkward gearchange is also common to both cars. The handling though, is good. Just the right amount of lift-off tuck-in to plot your course swiftly and accurately. As with the Fiat a wheel spinning standing start will cause the car to leap all over the road; best to wait until second gear for quick acceleration. Turbo-lag from the 1600 electronic injection twin-cam is now much reduced compared to the crude earlier (1984/5) carb-turbo. Power builds gradually and is strong from 3,000rpm up to 6,800rpm. A gear change into third, just before the 60mph yardstick is reached, spoils the 0-60mph time.

HF Turbo - what to look for

What could drive you mad with the Delta HF is electrical problems. Switchgear is weak, connections come loose and there is more electrical equipment involved in keeping the motor turning than on the simpler Fiat Abarth. The first thing to try to cure such a problem is the waggle test. Around 50% of mysterious electronic failures are loose connections.

Rear brake calipers seize and CV joints don't last that long. Headlamps are very difficult to find, and now rear suspension bushes are in short supply. The Delta seems to suffer less from tin worm attack than the Strada. Nevertheless when considering one, think "the newer the better". The model was discontinued in the UK in 1991. Values are very much condition dependent. Prices vary from £500 for a tatty runner with an MoT and might reach £4,000 for a really mint late car.

So which do you go for? Long term, and kept in tip-top condition, the Strada Abarth 130TC will be a better investment. The Scorpion badge will see to that. However, for everyday use, the Delta HF ie is the one. I like the purity of Fiats and I like the way they combine neat design features with utilitarianism. The mechanical and electrical engineering in Fiat cars is strong and reliable. The Lancia Delta does have practical benefits. They sold in greater numbers than the Abarth, so there are more to choose from. The superior comfort and the spares situation are also tempting factors. I'd have the Delta, I think... If you're not sure which to choose, maybe some advice from Mae West (Actress 1892-1980) would help, "Whenever I'm caught between two evils, I take the one I've never tried."

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

LANCIA DELTA HF ie TURBO

ENGINE

Type	4-cylinder, iron block, alloy head
Location	Front transverse
Bore/Stroke	84mm x 71.5mm
Capacity	1,585cc
	Comp. ratio 8.0:1
Fuel system	IAW Weber Marelli injection, Garrett T2 Turbo, Intercooler
Valves	2 per cylinder
Camshafts	DOHC, belt driven
Max power	140bhp at 5,500rpm
Max torque	141lbsft at 3,500rpm

TRANSMISSION

Gearbox	5-speed + rev.
Differential	Ratio 3.4:1

STEERING

Type	Rack & pinion, 3.75 turns, Lock to Lock

SUSPENSION

Front	MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar
Rear	MacPherson struts, multi link, Anti-roll bar

BRAKES

Front/Rear	Servo-assisted Discs all-round

WHEELS

Front/Rear	Alloy 5.5J x 14

DIMENSIONS

Length	3,895mm
Width	1,620mm
Height	1,380mm
Wheelbase	2,475mm
Weight	1020kg
Boot capacity	9/35 cuft

PERFORMANCE

Top Speed	126mph
0-60mph	8.5 sec
0-100mph	24 sec
Fuel cons.	27mpg

PRICE

Condition 1	£2,500 - £3,900
Condition 2	£1,200 - £1,700
Condition 3	£300 - £800

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

FIAT STRADA ABARTH 130TC

ENGINE

Type	4-cylinder, iron block, alloy head
Location	Front transverse
Bore/Stroke	84mm x 90mm
Capacity	1,995cc
Comp. ratio	9.45:1
Fuel system	2 twin choke 40mm Solex or Weber Carburettors
Valves	2 per cylinder
Camshafts	DOHC, belt driven
Max power	130bhp at 5,900rpm
Max torque	130lbsft at 3,600rpm

TRANSMISSION

Gearbox	ZF 5-speed + rev.
Differential	Ratio 3.4:1

STEERING

Type	Rack & pinion, 3.5 turns lock to lock

SUSPENSION

Front	MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar
Rear	MacPherson struts, transverse leaf spring Anti-roll bar

BRAKES

Front/Rear	Servo-assisted Front discs Rear drums

WHEELS

Front/Rear	Alloy 5.5J x 14

DIMENSIONS

Length	4,014mm
Width	1,663mm
Height	1,390mm
Wheelbase	2,440mm
Weight	983kg
Boot capacity	13/44 cuft

PERFORMANCE

Top Speed	121mph
0-60mph	8 sec
0-100mph	23.2 sec
Fuel cons.	26mpg

PRICE

Condition 1	£3,500 - £5,000
Condition 2	£1,500 - £2,500
Condition 3	£600 - £1,500

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