

NUOVA POTENTE PICCOLA AUTO ITALIANA

CONCORSO ITALIANO IN MONTEREY IS THE PERFECT PLACE TO INTRODUCE A NEW MEMBER OF THE FABLED FIAT CINQUECENTO BLOODLINE. BY JOE SAGE

There are always (increasingly) a number of concept and new vehicle reveals during Monterey Auto Week, on the greens at Pebble Beach and in the surrounding hills. But if you have a hot little item with Italian blood, there's one best place to do it: at Concorso Italiano, on the greens of Laguna Seca Golf Ranch along the Salinas Highway north of Monterey.

And that's where we caught up with Fiat in August, as they pulled the wraps off the latest iteration of the still-new-to-market Fiat 500 (Cinquecento).

We've driven the basic Fiat 500 around Arizona (see our Sept/Oct 2011 issue), and we drove the potent little Abarth in the mountains outside Las Vegas, including on the track at Spring Mountain Motorsports Ranch (see our May/June 2012 issue). Those two cars cover a lot of possibilities, but Fiat saw an opportunity in between.

Enter the 2013 Fiat 500 Turbo.

The base Fiat 500 (in any of three flavors: Pop, Sport or Lounge) has a 101-hp 1.4L 4-cylinder engine, while the Abarth has a turbocharged and twin-intercooled version with modified crank and injection, pumping out 160 hp. The Abarth outdoes the regular 500 even moreso in torque: 170 lb-ft versus 98, and has a heavy-duty transmission with higher gear ratios and final drive ratio. Abarth suspension adds a 22mm rear stabilizer bar.

Prices for the standard Pop, Sport and Lounge 500s start at \$16,000, \$17,500 and \$18,500, respectively. The Abarth starts at \$22,000. A 500 Sport includes performance enhancements such as sport-tuned shocks and

springs in front and rear. The Abarth, with additional bodywork for style and ground effects, is almost five inches longer than the standard 500. And so on.

For those watching their budget closely, or for those who find the 160-horse Abarth more than they want to manage daily, the Fiat 500 Turbo (or 500T) weighs in at 135 hp (and 150 lb-ft) with a turbocharged version of the 1.4L, and adds a performance lower-control arm to the sport-tuned front suspension, plus high performance, track-proven larger brakes, along with performance and aerodynamic body design cues (matching the Abarth in length) and its own sport-styled interior.

When you're not taking in the engine note, the 500T delivers studio-quality audio via a segment-exclusive new Beats by Dr Dre sound system.

From a technical standpoint, the Fiat 500 Turbo hits a sweet spot between the others, and pricewise it does the same, starting at \$19,500. If you're looking for more pep than the base 500, this \$17,500-19,500-22,000 performance price structure (Sport, Turbo, Abarth) presents a great set of options. Each has a little bit different style and feel, but all deliver successively more potent versions of the Cinquecento experience. There's little question that two grand (about 11 percent) is a very reasonable amount to pay for a 35 percent hike in horsepower. (Fiat also teased us with à la carte Abarth parts, which will become available for your own modifications.) The new Fiat 500T enters the market as one of the most affordable turbocharged cars available in the US. ■

