

# Petite urban passion

by Joe Sage

Like New York City itself, the Smart ForTwo squeezes incredible amounts of premium usefulness into a very small space. It can also perform admirably on the wide open freeways of the Southwest.



Once quite pricey (and always quirky), but now faced with affordable, more conventional competitors, the Smart car has embarked on a price war. One key point about the new Smart ForTwo Cabriolet, at its recent introduction in that most undrivable of places, New York City—Brooklyn, specifically—was its \$18,900 starting price, the most affordable convertible and the only one under \$20,000. (Fiat promptly announced a 2017 500c price to beat that, all good news for the teeny open-top European car buyer.)

Smart doesn't need to drop its price to attract its typical demographic. The Smart ForTwo and Smart ForTwo Cabriolet micro cars sell to folks with a median household income of \$72,334 and \$107,277, respectively, topping 14 competitors in the city car segment, from Kia Rio and Chevrolet Spark, to Scion xD and Nissan Cube, whose buyers' incomes run from about \$36,000 to \$70,000.

Smart is winner of the 2016 JD Power APEAL (Automotive Performance Execution and Layout) award in this segment, based on owners' experiences with performance, ride, handling, comfort, convenience, styling and infotainment. Smart was pitted against Fiat 500 and Chevy Spark and aced everything but performance.

Traditional performance measures of speed and acceleration are arguably less important in a city car (though Smart's 10.1-second zero-to-60 time is just a couple of seconds off some impressive sport sedans of 15 or 20 years ago.) More important is maneuverability and the ability to park in the tightest of spots, where Smart's 22.8-foot turning circle and 106.1-inch length ensure a win. (A MINI's turning circle is around 36 feet, and a Ford Fusion is 192 inches long, 81 percent longer than the Smart. That's right—you can park two Smarts in some single spaces.)

Of course, parking two in one space may earn you some unwanted attention, and if you live in New York, that just might come from an officer driving a Smart car—NYPD knows exactly what it takes to face that urban jam every day, and they've just bought 250 of them (see sidebar).

Aside from supercar speed, the Smart's performance is solid. Steering and suspension are as sophisticated as in vehicles at twice the cost, and its structure meets all the same crash requirements as a Mercedes-Benz S-Class—even being dropped on its roof. Even the Smart Cabriolet with its top down—a power process that takes just a few seconds—retains its Tridion safety cell structure, which is like the rollover cage in a race car. The top can be retracted just full-sunroof-style or farther down in the back, while the cargo area remains fully available every which way.

Early Smarts were known for an awkward automatic transmission. The Smart ED electric

inherently eliminated those issues. But the new gasoline Smart has solved things the old-fashioned way, with a top-notch dual-clutch automatic or the welcome choice of a 5-speed manual.

The car weighs just a ton, so its 89 horsepower and 100 lb-ft of torque are closer to 200 each if extrapolated to typical midsize sedan weight.

From the surprisingly spacious interior, you really won't notice how small the car is until you park it, or make a very tight maneuver around a truck, or do high-speed donuts in the parking lot at Coney Island's Cyclone rollercoaster, as we did.

Features include power steering, windows, top and cargo cover, Bluetooth media, alarm, cruise, automatic climate, leather steering wheel, rear camera, alloy wheels, LED DRLs, crosswind assist, proximity warning and six airbags.

Bottom line: this is not a tiny car with tiny car tradeoffs, but a very normal driving experience with endless bonuses—turning, parking, dashing and darting in ways no normal car can.

(By the way, Smart spells itself with a small "s" and "fortwo" gets the same treatment. We play along with many such rules, but with this one it just gets lost in text, so we capitalize.)

The Smart ForTwo coupe has four trim levels—pure, passion, prime and proxy (yes, small letters)—from \$14,650 to \$18,480. The Cabriolet skips pure, with passion, prime and proxy from \$18,900 to \$20,900. In this economized world, even going drop-top is just \$2420-2760. There are ten body colors, six more for the Tridion cell, four for the grille, leather or upholstery interiors in black, grey, orange and blue, and six different wheels. On the Cabriolet, there are also two roof colors (black or red). There are well over 100 combinations. Mix and match. Go nuts. They like that.

If higher performance still nags at you, Smart is also releasing a Brabus Sport Package (both coupe and cabrio), starting right about now. Upgraded Brabus suspension is 10mm lower and includes heavier stabilizer bar and tuned dampers. Wheels, paint and tires are upgraded. Interiors are Brabus specialized, the body adds spoilers and aprons all around, and automatics get paddle shifters. And all this is just \$1900.

The price drop is a bonus—a significant one. Clearly, Smart has recognized that conditions are better aligned than ever for this unusual offering, which still turns heads after all this time. Higher sales volume is an apparent goal. One look at the streets of Brooklyn lined with our fleet of Smart ForTwo Cabriolets, or an easy visualization of New York City with hundreds of blue and white NYPD police Smarts—coupled with the premium value and features in this little beast—and it's not hard to imagine these populating the streets of America in the biggest numbers ever. ■



## SPECIFICATIONS

### SMART FORTWO CABRIOLET

SEATING	.....two
ENGINE	.....alum alloy 0.9L inline-3 turbo
DRIVETRAIN	.....FWD
HP/TORQUE	.....89 hp / 100 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	.....5-spd manual / 6-spd DCT
0-TO-60 / TOP SPEED	.....10.7 sec / 94 mph
STEERING	.....speed-sens elect-mech rack&p
SUSPENSION: F	indep multi-link, coil spring, double-tube shocks, tubular tension bar
R	De-Dion rear axle, coil spring, double-tube shock
BRAKES	.....F 10.2 disc / R 8.0 drum
WHEELS	.....F 4.5x15, R 5.5x15 (cast)
TURNING CIRCLE	.....22.8 ft
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....106.1 in / 73.7 in
WEIGHT	.....manual 2094 lb / auto 2150 lb
FUEL CAPACITY	.....8.7 gal
MPG (c/h/c)	.....31/38/34 man / 33/38/35 auto

BASE PRICE...man **\$18,900** / auto **\$19,890**  
DESTINATION CHARGE.....750

## NYPD



### NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT ORDERS 250 SMART FORTWOS

The New York City Police Department (NYPD) has bought 250 Smart ForTwo cars for their 9000-vehicle fleet, with 100 delivered earlier this fall and another 150 already ordered. NYPD will use these to replace the three-wheelers they have long used for certain duties.

NYPD chose the Smart ForTwo for its agility, spaciousness and reliability. Unlike the three-wheelers, the Smarts also have air conditioning, making officers' work easier in the hot New York summer. The white and blue police Smarts have specific equipment, including a blue revolving roof lamp and police radios. Officer Ralph Jefferson, whose beat is Chinatown, says the Smart "makes my job much easier. Many people say that the little patrol cars are really cute, too." ■

