

## Motoring New Car Road Test

# The electric Fiat 500 brings this

Fiat's first bespoke EV is making some big promises, but does it succeed? **Ted Welford** gets behind the wheel to find out

FIAT isn't a firm known for being ahead of the curve.

In fact, it usually watches from afar to see if trends take off before getting in on the action – it even admitted as much at the launch of a mild-hybrid 500 last year. That model extended the lifetime of the petrol 500 further, which has been on sale since 2007. Though – impressively considering it's never been substantially changed – sales of it show no signs of slowing.

But Fiat knows it has to change and that is what has led to the introduction of this new electric model – simply called the 'New 500' rather than, for example, the 500e. Can it rival the growing range of compact EVs, though? We've been finding out.

### What's new?

While this new model might still look unmistakably like a 500 – though with differences which we'll explain later – it actually doesn't share a single component with the petrol model. For clarity, the combustion-powered model is going nowhere, with the firm saying it will be sold for 'years to come'.

But back to the EV, which sits on a new electric-car platform, bringing a slight increase in dimensions alongside a range of important enhancements – including a new infotainment system and Level 2 semi-autonomous driving capability.



■ Although much has been changed to produce the New 500, the car is unmistakably part of the Fiat brand

### What's under the car's bonnet?

There's a choice of two powertrains on the 500 – a 'City Range' and a 'Long Range'. The former aims to make EVs more accessible, though does so by using a small

24kWh battery that enables a small 115-mile range.

But the vast majority are expected to go for the Long Range, which features a significantly larger 42kWh battery that unlocks an impressive claimed 199-mile range, though expect closer to 160 miles based on our test car's estimations. The ability to charge at up to 85kW also means its battery can be topped from flat to 80 per cent in just 35 minutes using a rapid charger, too.

That battery, combined with an 87kW electric motor, which produces 116bhp and 220Nm of torque, enables a 0-60mph time of under nine seconds and a top speed of 93mph.

### What's it like to drive?

Next to the somewhat lacklustre petrol options in the regular 500, this new EV model is a true revelation. The zippy nature of the electric motor makes it a perfect fit around town, with an immediacy never seen with this Fiat before. Even at higher motorway speeds it never feels like it's running out of steam, either. Its light steering makes manoeuvring especially easy, though it does mean it's not quite as involving as the Mini Electric – one of the 500's key rivals. We also reckon the ride is a bit busy and unsettled around town, though opting for smaller wheels might improve things a touch.

There are also three clear driving modes to use – Normal, Range and Sherpa. The former lives up to its name, with Fiat offering this to make it better suited to those not used to EVs. Range then brings in added regenerative braking, which enables 'one-pedal' driving, while the Sherpa mode aims to maximise the number of miles by cutting the power available, turning off the air-con and limiting the top speed to 50mph.

### How does it look?

At first glance, you might reckon this electric model doesn't look too dissimilar from its petrol counterpart, but there are actually plenty of changes. For starters, this new platform means the 500 is 6cm longer and 6cm wider. This might not seem noticeable at first, but park it next to the existing car and there's a clear size difference.

You'll also notice the lack of 'Fiat' badge on the front end, with the model just using a prominent '500' logo instead – while a further appealing feature is the bonnet and headlight design, with part of the lights being integrated into the hood to give the car a rather cool signature. Despite the changes, though, it's still unmistakably a '500'.

### What's it like inside?

Without a doubt, the biggest weakness of the petrol 500 is its interior, which looks and feels just as outdated as it is. It's all changed here, though, with all but the entry-level Access car getting a new touchscreen that's clear, responsive and possibly one of the best systems to use today. It's especially appealing on higher-spec cars that use the larger 10.25-inch screen.

Elsewhere there's a smart new digital-dial system and a more upmarket-feeling steering wheel with smart new touch. The space in the front also feels far more plentiful than the regular car, not least due to the additional width and lack of transmission tunnel.

It's not all plain-sailing, though. Rear seat and boot space remain just as compromised as the petrol model, and though quality has improved significantly, there are still plenty of cheaper plastics on display that don't quite fit the car's price.

### What's the spec like?

Where affordability is concerned, the basic Action model is the one to go for. With a price of just £20,495 once the government's electric-car grant has been deducted, it's one of the cheapest ways to get behind the wheel of a new EV. Standard equipment isn't bad, either, with keyless entry, rear parking sensors and a digital-dial display all fitted.

You'll need to spend £23,995 for a 'Passion' trim before you get the 199-mile range model, though, with this adding cruise control, climate control and a seven-inch touchscreen with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

Our Icon-trim model (from £25,495) brings keyless entry, 16-inch alloy wheels and the impressive 10.25-inch media system. Meanwhile, at the top of the range is the 'La Prima'. Costing £27,495 – and with no options available on it – it comes



■ The car's interior is a major step up from Fiat's petrol version of the 500



■ Fiat is offering two powertrains – City Range and Long Range. Respectively they provide around 115 miles and 199 miles on a full charge

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## popular city car right up to date

### Fast facts

- Model: Electric Fiat 500
- Price: Starting from £28,495 from Motor Mall
- Model as tested: Fiat 500 Icon Electric 42kWh 118hp
- Engine: 87kW electric motor with 42kWh battery
- Power: 116bhp
- Torque: 220Nm
- Max speed: 93mph
- 0-60mph: 8.8 seconds
- Emissions: 0g/km CO<sub>2</sub>
- Range: 199 miles

loaded with LED headlights, a reversing camera with 360-degree parking sensors and a range of Level 2 semi-autonomous driving features.

### Verdict

There are some cars that just suit an electric powertrain perfectly and that's definitely the case with the New 500. In just about every conceivable area – perhaps with the exception of price – it's better than the petrol car.

With a long electric range (for such a small car), impressive interior and clever touchscreen as well as the same unmissable styling that's been key to the 500's success since its rebirth in 2007, it truly future proofs this lovable city car for years to come. But, let's revert back to the present, and right now, this new electric 500 is possibly the best compact EV on the market today.



■ The New 500's rapid-charging function can top the battery up from flat to 80% in just 35 minutes