



Fiat 500L

Big brother

Review | A big brother has pros and cons. A disadvantage of having a big brother is that he is stronger and smarter, it's almost impossible to beat him. However, the upside of having a big brother who is stronger and smarter is that there's lots to learn from him. Now the Fiat 500 has gained a big brother. Is that a curse or a blessing?

Five years ago, when the new Fiat 500 was introduced, rumours about an extra spacious were already circulating. With good reason: when the first Fiat 500 was introduced in the 1960s, there was already an extra large "Giardiniera".

It is because of marketing strategies that the new, extra large Fiat is named "500L". The new Fiat 500 is well known for its handling, frugal engines and fair price. So it seems only logical to call the new family car "500L" to give it a head start.



Although the 500L is built on a new platform and not a single part has been carried over, the design language is the same. The 500L has the same cheerful looks with soft, organic shapes. The car has grown in every direction, yet thanks to the playful lines it doesn't look as large as it actually is. For example: a Ford B-Max, Citroën C3 Picasso and Hyundai ix20 are all smaller!

Its growth does go at the expense of harmonious looks though. Seen from the side the 500L has all the charm of a sea cow: it isn't threatening or ugly, but it's only other sea cows who might think that it is attractive. The only resemblance with the 500 is obvious when seen straight from the front.



The 500L does offer all the practicalities of an MPV. There are lots of cubbyholes and other storage spaces in the front. Regrettably both glove compartments are very small. There are airplane style tables for the back seat. On top of all this the test car had beautiful upholstery, which Fiat says gives the 500L the looks of a "lounge".

The boot is easy to reach, thanks to a very low threshold and a bootlid that opens very far (even adults can comfortably stand under the opened boot lid). The luggage floor can be installed at two different heights. This could be used to separate dry and wet luggage, for example.

Multi-Purpose Vehicle

Of course Fiat could have built a five-door 500, instead the 500L is meant to be a real space miracle. And in that respect the car convinces from the very start! The space in the front is ample and when the driver's seat is moved all the way to the back many would not be able to reach the pedals anymore! Even with the driver's seat all the way to the back, legroom in the rear is still fine. This means the 500L isn't just meant for families with small children. Even teenagers and grown-ups sit comfortably in the back.

Even though the design of the exterior suggests differently, the 500L offers the space of a true MPV (Multi Purpose Vehicle). However, the seating position isn't that of an MPV. Instead the driver feels like operating an average, be it somewhat tall, hatchback.



Trim level

It's only when it comes to its standard equipment that the 500L shows its family ties with the basic 500. This means the 500L has "City" power steering, which is extremely light to make parking easier. Because this does make it easy to steer the front wheels while standing still, there is serious risk of extra wear and tear on the front wheels.



"TomTom & Me" is a smart and affordable satnav and trip computer. It also offers an eco:Drive function, which can be used to analyse the driver's behaviour and is aimed at teaching a more economic driver style. Every drive can be scrutinised on a PC at home and even compared to the habits of other 500L owners. The 500L is the first Fiat that is available with both a semi-integrated and a fully-integrated TomTom unit. The latter is a bit more expensive, but does look much better.

The test vehicle was fitted with an optional audio system with "Beats by Dre". It has a crisp and powerful sound which makes it stand out from a cheap audio system. At the same time it doesn't sound forced or tiresome. However, the extra price is so stiff that aftermarket products can offer an even better sound at a lower price.



Diesel

The 500L is available with the same engines as the three-door 500. For this test the brand new 1.6 Multijet diesel engine was tried. While the quirky two-cylinder petrol engine has a very peculiar character, the relatively big four-cylinder power train is more quiet and refined. Only at very low speeds does it emit the characteristic sound of a diesel engine. Once at cruising speed the engine sound nicely blends with the other noises.

On the open road the diesel is torque strong (320 Nm) and really shines. Accelerating from a high speed to an even higher speed seems to be no problem at all. The sixth gear is an extreme overdrive. This means sprinting power is minimal. It also means engine speed is kept low as is the engine noise and thirstiness. To put it into numbers: 120 km/h (75 mph) is just 2,000 rpm.



Handling

The Fiat 500 is chosen for its looks and handling. As stated before, the 500 and 500L do not share the same platform. This means the 500L isn't as manoeuvrable and dynamic as a Fiat 500. It also tilts over more when cornering.

Yet, the 500L does grip as well as the 500! The feeling in the steering wheel is as good as well. This means the family resemblance is obvious and the big brother is already one step ahead of its sibling.



Conclusion

The Fiat 500 has gained a big brother named "500L".

That is both good and bad news. The bad news is that the 500L doesn't have the looks and charm of a three-door 500. On the other hand, thanks to its 500 genes it doesn't look as big and bulky as its main rivals. The cabin is exceptionally spacious and offers many smart ways to make the best possible use of that space.

The 500L doesn't handle as well as the original Fiat 500, but the difference is slim. The 1.6 Multijet diesel tested here convinces with fair performance and high efficiency.

The playful disposition of the original Fiat 500 has been replaced with a more mature character, and that's exactly the way it should be with a big brother. ■



Specifications

Fiat 500L 1.6 Multijet Lounge

Size and weight



Length x width x height	415 x 178 x 166 cm
Wheelbase	261 cm
Kerb weight	1.340 kg
Trailer	400 kg
Trailer - braked	1.100 kg
Fuel capacity	50 l
Luggage space	343/1310 l
Tyre size	205/55R16

Engine and performance



Capacity	1598 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/
Max power	105 PS @ 3750 rpm
Max torque	320 Nm @ 1750 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	11.3 secs
Top speed	181 km/h
Average mileage	4.5 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	5.4 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	3.9 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	117 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 18,890
Price base model	Â£ 14,995