



## Sunday drive: FIAT 500X Cross Plus, 1.3A

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With the on-going arrival of all-new SUVs of all sizes in full swing, the popular market sector also offers updated versions of SUVs which have been available for much longer, *writes David Miles.*



At the compact end of the SUV market one such revised and refreshed model range made its UK debut at the end of last year. This was the refreshed five-door compact Fiat 500X, termed the original Italian Crossover. Although a compact SUV it is one of the largest models in the popular Fiat 500 family which includes hatchback and convertible city cars, the 500X compact SUV and the 500L small MPV.

The revised 2019 model year 500X has tweaks to its exterior styling, revised engines and an auto transmission with deletion of 4WD and diesel versions due to low sales. But one thing is constant - it's still got that muscular image, some would say bloated, but let's be reasonable and say chunky. Most noticeable exterior changes are the new LED daytime running lights, LED headlights and rear light units.

It has two body styles which are self explanatory - Urban and Cross but all are front wheel drive. There are now four trim and equipment levels - Urban, City Cross, Cross Plus and just added S-Design. Which spec depends on the engine chosen and prices start from £16,995 and range up to £23,195. As most new car buying retail customers for any brand select a PCP finance purchase offer, the Fiat 500X range with a 48-month contract starts at £159 per month for the lowest price model and rises to £239 a month for the top spec version.



The engine options, depending on body style and spec level, are a 1.6-litre, 4-cylinder, 110hp normally aspirated e-TorQ petrol unit with a 5-speed manual gearbox and two new 'FireFly' turbocharged



EU 6.2 compliant direct injection petrol units, the 1.0-litre 3-cylinder 120hp with a 6-speed manual gearbox and a 1.3-litre 4-cylinder 150hp unit matched with a 6-speed dual clutch automatic gearbox.

Whichever engine is chosen and whatever body style and spec level is opted for will depend on a customer's requirements and of course affordability. The major thing the 500X has going for it is its distinctive styling, it won't be to everybody's choice but at least it is different from the plethora of similar sized compact SUV on sale. Personalisation options have played a major part in the popularity of the 500X which has accumulated over 1.5 million global sales.

Comments passed to me during my driving spell ranged from 'ugly' to 'interesting'; there is no question the 500X does divide opinions. Fiat see it appealing to younger buyers, perhaps the family second car but its compact size doesn't fit happily with school-run duties.



Most likely, and from those users I've seen, it's likely the 'young at heart' empty nesters who will enjoy the 500X most as an alternative to the aging Nissan Juke or perhaps



the Vauxhall Mokka, Peugeot 2008 and MINI Countryman. I see numerous older couples in my locality with the Mokka - they like the price, compact size for parking, low running costs and the higher ground clearance which makes getting in and out of the vehicle easier.

To that end the Fiat 500X unique fashionable styling, a huge array of personalisation options and compact SUV functionality at reasonable prices could be appealing to those fancying a change.

The top of the range Cross Plus 1.3 150hp automatic priced at £23,195 I tried will suit a wide range of customers but only if they don't deem 4WD a necessity and some competitors still offer this function. Of course being the modern-way there are numerous extra cost options which can be added and my test car had loads of them pushing the price up to £25,780 and at that price we are into a much larger choice of roomier medium sized SUVs so It's buyer beware when it comes to selecting what version suits your requirements and pocket.

Getting inside the latest 500X, whilst the styling is familiar to the past models, there are



detailed changes with more technology, better ergonomics and a general refreshed environment. The fascia has a coloured facing panel matched to the exterior paintwork running more or less the full width with the usual central touchscreen.

The quality and fit of the trim and upholstery looks to have improved with soft-touch elements. Traffic Sign Recognition, Intelligent Speed Assist and Lane Assist driving assist systems are standard on all versions as are the latest in connectivity with Uconnect 7-inch HD LIVE touchscreen with DAB radio, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay integration and Android Auto compatibility.

Separate from the touchscreen functions are easy to use heating and ventilation controls together with dual-zone automatic air-con. Also included with the Cross Plus spec are cruise control,



multi-function leather bound steering wheel, 60/40 split folding rear seat backs, remote central locking, electric heated and adjustable door mirrors, Start & Stop, rear parking sensors and a rear view mirror. This spec level also adds for the exterior 18-inch alloy wheels Cross Plus spec all-road bumpers with protective inserts, front fog lights with cornering function.



However if you want leather upholstery that costs an extra £850, front parking sensors at £300 plus £950 for an electric sunroof and £650 for the Active Safety Pack which should be a standard item. Even a space saver spare wheel sets you back another £100 otherwise you get an inflation kit.

The chunky looking 500X uses the platform from the Jeep Renegade SUV, another member of the Fiat Chrysler Automobiles family. But in the latest changes to the range 4WD models have been deleted as have diesel models due to low sales. The 1.3-litre, 4-cylinder direct injection turbocharged petrol engine is one of two new 'FireFly' generation units introduced to comply with the new EU 6.2 regulations.



Like its predecessor petrol units it's a free-revving engine, eager to please and with 270Nm of torque from 1,850rpm it proved to be responsive and well suited to its partnership as



standard with the new 6-speed dual-clutch auto gearbox.

There is no need to keep the engine in its relatively high rpm powerband, the auto box does that for the driver so the flexibility moving from low to medium to higher speeds is good, although not always seamless.

On a few occasions there was some indecision as to what gear was needed, mainly between second and third gears, especially after first starts on a cold day. But overall the new engine and auto box proved to be a nice combination to drive.

The ride comfort, even with the larger 18-inch wheels, was good with only the worst of the potholes transmitting a thump into the passenger compartment. The handling was neat and nimble given its relatively tall height and it was easy to park due to its compact length and good visibility.



For those wanting a fashionable compact SUV, that's just a bit different with its retro styling, it meets that need. Despite its relatively small size with the responsive new 1.3-litre petrol engine there are no drawbacks



once it comes to high speed open road cruising.

Yes it will be an acquired taste, but sometimes it pays to be different.

### **MILESTONES:**

2019 Fiat 500X Cross Plus, 1.3 FireFly 150hp automatic, compact SUV £23,195 (£25,780 as tested with options)

Engine/transmission: 1.3-litre, 4-cylinder, direct injection turbocharged petrol, EU 6.2 compliant, 6-speed dual clutch automatic, 2WD

Performance: 124mph, 0-62mph 9.1-seconds, Combined Cycle 43.5mpg (36.5mpg on test)





CO2 146g/km, VED £205/£140, BiK company car tax 30%

Insurance group: 16      Warranty: 3-years/unlimited mileage

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,269mm, W 1,796mm, H 1,603mm, wheelbase 2,570mm,  
boot/load space 350 to 1,000-litres, braked towing weight 1,200kg, 5-doors/4-5-seats

**For:** Unique and appealing, for some customers, retro styling in its class, wide range of personalisation options, new lively petrol engine option, neat and nimble handling, comfortable, easy to park

**Against:** Some jerky auto gear changes, no 4WD or diesel models in the revised range, limited rear seat space and legroom, high company car tax costs for a small vehicle, loads of extra cost and personalisation options – but at considerable costs.