

FIAT 1500 SPIDER



The wind-in-the-face two-seat sports car has evolved into a cabriolet with creature comforts. Here's a shining example.

Regardless of what your idea of a sports car may be, if you are in the market for a two-seater and have \$2500 dollars to spend, the choice almost has to be either British or Italian. \$2500 is the dividing line—about \$400 above the Sprite and MG Midget category and way below the usual \$3300 to \$4000 you'll have to pay for one of the new Triumph TR-4-As.

The cars that fall into this category include the Sunbeam Alpine and MG-B, on the higher end of the scale, and the Fiat 1500 Cabriolet. To extend the range of models you'll have to either add or subtract quite a bundle, one way or the other.

The Fiat roadster has evolved from a rather spindly-looking spider into an attractive one, by any stand-



Fiat's manual convertible top is one of the easiest to handle among all sports cars. Can even be erected while seated behind wheel. Workmanship and fabric is of high order.

ards, (and ROAD TEST seldom comments on style).

In many areas you could take off the Fiat medallions and substitute the prancing black horse for them and few would know the difference.

Pinin Farina styled the body of the Fiat several years ago and, as time has gone by, the car has changed little on the outside, but every year it gets better.

Although it probably will never constitute much of a threat at Le Mans or the Targio Florio, the Fiat is a good choice for the wind-in-the-face fan who likes his sports cars with all the comfort and luggage space its possible to build into a two-seater because Fiat has done an admirable job of using every possible inch of space and putting it into service.

The 1500 offers a lot more than its \$2585.00 price tag would lead one to assume. All the luxuries of the modern sports car are included at no extra cost. You have your choice of Pirelli Cinturato or Michelin-X radial cord tires; front disc brakes with finned drums at the rear; a top which is as easy to operate as it is to look at; twin leatherette bucket seats; a top boot and a huge trunk—to mention only a few of its good points.

For 1966 the big feature is the Fiat's new, all-synchromesh 5-speed gearbox. This arrangement lets the engine loaf at higher-than average freeway speeds and insures longer life and far better gasoline mileage than the former four-speed models could hope to attain.

ENGINEERING FEATURES

Designated the "Spider," the Fiat 1500 is really a rollup-window convertible Cabriolet. Its integral body insures a more rattle-free life span than other types. Independent front suspension is by short upper link and long lower A-arms with coil springs, hydraulic, double-acting telescopic shock absorbers and a stabilizer bar. Rear suspension is by semi-elliptic



More-complete-than-usual tool kit is included with jack in stowage bag. Most minor adjustments can be made using only these tools.



Crank-up jack operates with little effort, raises entire side of car at center of lateral balance. Weight distribution with driver is near 50/50.

springs and hydraulic, double-acting telescopic shock absorbers and another stabilizer bar.

The proof of the pudding is in the driving in the Fiat. It is perfectly predictable and can be hustled through corners with a minimum of worry and a minimum of fuss. When its limits are finally reached, the front will understeer, but everything happens in a perfectly logical manner. This means the Fiat is a very safe automobile to drive fast. It is one that's easy to get used to and one that is pretty stable under all driving conditions.

The engine is Fiat's 1481 cc aluminum head four-banger with one Weber 34 DCHD-4 carburetor and 8.8 : 1 compression ratio that requires premium gas. Horsepower is up by three this year from last year's 80 to the current 83 horses . . . enough to do the everyday transportation job for almost anyone except the week end racer. The engine is tweaked only mildly for longevity rather than competition.

Don't think that the 83 horses aren't enough for decent performance, though. The car weighs a little over 2,100 pounds and the engine will get 6,000 rpm in the first four gears with a final drive ratio of 4.11 to 1. The usual 4-speed H pattern is followed. Then, when out on the road and moving along at cruising speed, putting in the clutch and moving the gear lever up to the right toward the dash selects fifth gear, an overdrive ratio of .86 to 1.

Running in this gear at a steady 80 miles an hour will still give you 32 mph economy, which isn't all bad. In fifth, the whole car seems to relax and hit its stride. The engine seems to hit just the right note. It pulls acceptably in the indirect gears and fourth as well. Ratios are fairly spaced to keep peak torque



Girling power-assisted disc brakes are fitted to front wheels with drum type at rear. Braking capability is in line with performance.

under the rpm curve at 3.2 (first), 1.98 (second) and 1.41 (third). Fourth is direct 1 to 1, of course.

Brakes are a strong point with the Fiat 1500. Girling-type discs up front are supplemented by big finned drums in the rear. The system is power-assisted. A mechanical hand brake is located by the driver's right leg. It is effective for starting on a hill, but is quite a reach for the short-armed members of our staff.

Since all cars in the Fiat's class have superior brakes anyway, it is difficult to make comparisons. The Fiat's brakes are more than adequate for its top speed. During our tests they have never shown fade or caused any loss of control on hard stops. When combined with the excellent adhesion properties of Perilli and/or Michelin tires the brakes were more than adequate for any driving situation.

INTERIOR & CONTROLS

Most staff members agreed the Fiat is one of the most comfortable 2-seaters they've driven, regardless of price. The leatherette-covered buckets give good support to back legs and to shoulders. The padding under the upholstery is thick enough that the seat doesn't bottom or let one feel the springs through the seat's material. Both seats sit low, (9 inches from the floor), and have a good deal of adjustment. (Thus allowing the driver to assume the well-known Italian, straight-arm driving position that gets very tiring on any long trip.) Doors open up 38 inches wide for easy entrance and exit by sports car standards and the seat backs offer adjustments for rake.

In front of the driver is a big, round speedometer and an equally big, round tachometer; (an item Fiats lacked for a good many years.)

Padded dash, electric wipers and washers, a powerful fresh-air heater and a desirable steering column lock are all standard features. A row of under-dash toggle switches is provided to operate everything from the heater to the map light. The hood latch is located inside the passenger compartment, a decided anti-theft feature.

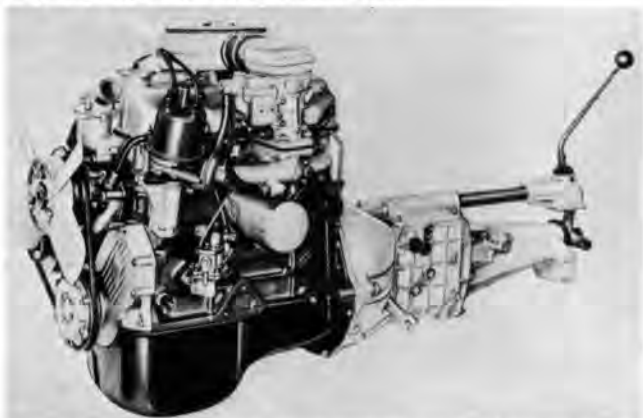
Right behind the seats is a good-sized area for carrying extra luggage, but no provision is made for carrying more than two people. The 1500 has a huge trunk by comparison with its peers and it is all usable space since the spare is located beneath the trunk floor. In the event one has to change a tire, the Cabriolet comes with an excellent scissors jack that inserts in a frame slot and lifts the entire side of the car for easy wheel-switching.

APPOINTMENTS

The Fiat can easily claim the title of, "Fastest Top In Town". Release two catches on the windshield post and flip it back; that's all there is to it. If you have



Attention to finish detail is apparent in door jambs and sills. Interior is neat, functional. Instruments are big and legible. Spider is strictly a two-seater with only luggage space behind seats.



Fiat Spider engine is 1500 cc overhead valve four, mildly tuned and with relatively low compression (8 to 1). Cross-flow head porting (exhaust on one side, intake on the other) helps efficiency.



Fiat's traditional center-point steering arrangement offers added safety because steering shaft does not reach to front of vehicle.

strong arms you can raise the top while in the car by reaching back with one arm and pulling it up over your head. Once in place, it is virtually weather-proof and only lets a few drops inside during the most inclement weather. A boot cover is provided in the base price, but a full tonneau cover is an option. Head room with the top erected is more than adequate even for over six-footers.

The overall finish of the automobile is of high standards, certainly comparable with its English opposite numbers. Indications are that this is one Italian car which is fairly trouble-free.

There is evidence of good thinking here. If, for instance, the engine doesn't catch on the first whirl of the starter, it is necessary to shut it off and twist the key again after turning it back past the off position (like the VW).

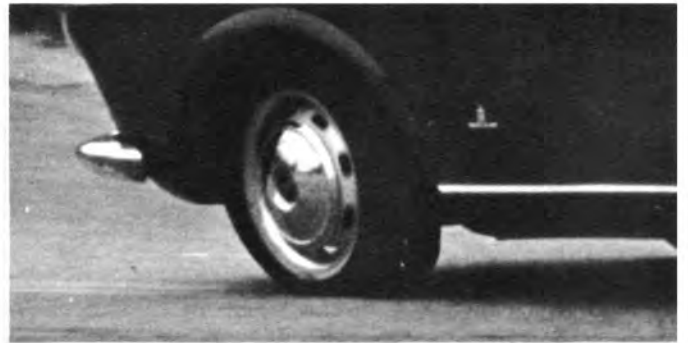
Fiat furnishes three different keys with the Spider; one opens the driver's door; the other is for the ignition, and the third is for the lockable gas cap. It's very confusing for the first few thousand miles or for beginners with a new car. The "wind wings" don't open as they do on most sports cars, but ventless side windows are the "new" thing, so here's a sports roadster that's up with the times, at least in the window vent department.

SUMMARY

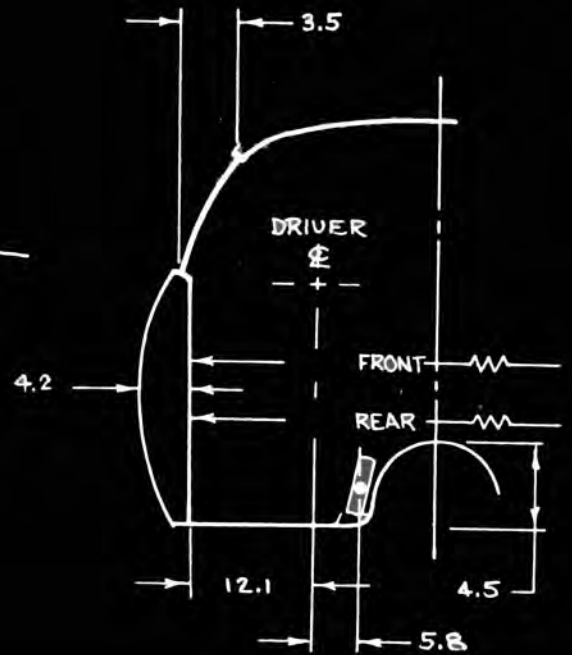
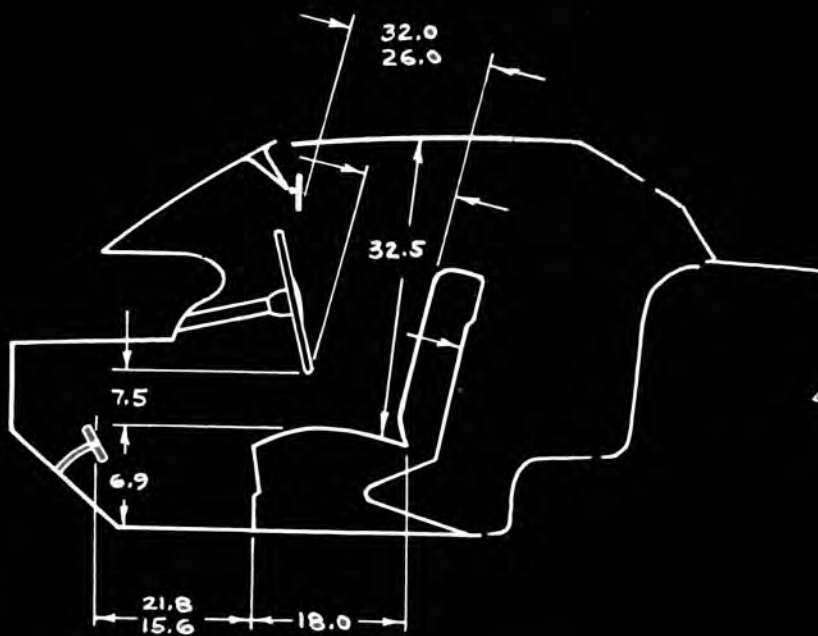
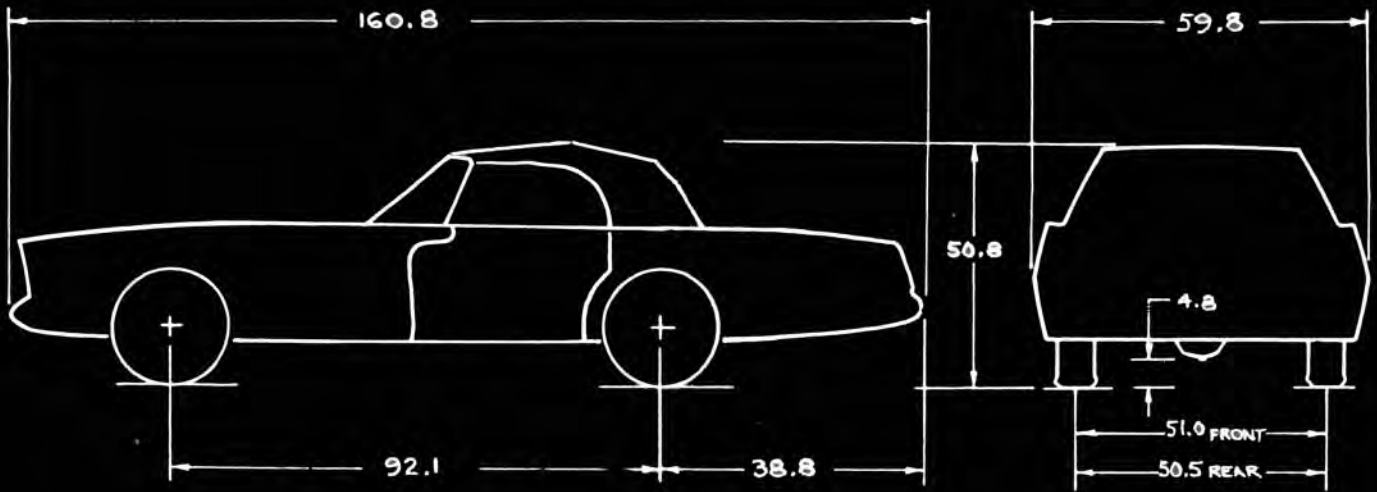
The ROAD TEST staff rates the Fiat Spider, or Cabriolet, as a better-than-average to very good buy in the \$2500 sports car price market. It has all the modern virtues a high-speed, two-passenger roadster should have; a top speed of more than 100 mph and excellent gasoline mileage at high-speed. Creature comforts are better than most in its category and the most efficient use has been made of every square inch of body space. In addition it has the verve associated with high-performance Italian sports machinery.

Right down to the chrome strip that protects the Farina lines from the inconsiderately-opened doors of standard sedans, the Fiat Cabriolet shows that lots of thought and constant improvements have gone into its development. It is the only roadster in its class that offers a five-speed gearbox as standard equipment and the only one at a much higher price we can think of would be the Porsche at about twice the Fiat's price. It's not necessary to shift yourself to death because you have five speeds to play with. Now there's a gear for every need.

Whenever a company makes a good car better and safer, they've made a step in the right direction. The Fiat's combination of predictable handling, good brakes, adequate tires and ample performance geared through a five-speed box has gained the desired results; a better, safer Fiat roadster that has to be one of the most functional ones on the highway today.



Although outside front tire appears to be perilously close to disaster (see inset photo), in this sequence, Fiat proves to be predictable and stable in turns. Diminishing radius downhill curve shows up basic understeering quality. Side bite, of radial tires is big assist in this situation. ROAD TEST staff feels that handling generally is as good as any car in this class.



SPECIFICATIONS

GENERAL

Curb weight	2128
Weight dist.	54.5/45.5
Brake type	disc/drum
Swept area, sq. in.	302
Tire size	145 X 14
Steering, turns	2.75
Turning circle	34.5

TRANS.

Clutch dia.	7.25
Std. ratios, 5th	0.864:1
4th	1.0:1
3rd	1.41:1
2nd	1.989:1
1st	3.242:1
Diff. ratio	4.1:1

ENGINE

Type	4 cyl ohv
Bore	3.03
Stroke	3.13
Disp. cu. in.	90.3
Comp. ratio	9.0:1
BHP @ rpm	83@5400
Torque @ rpm	86.8@3400