



## Celebrating 60 Years of an Iconic Vehicle: The FIAT 500

Samantha Janazzo, Alex Catti (February 07, 2017)



60 years ago the FIAT 500 was released in Turin, Italy. Today, it continues to be one of the most popular automobiles in the world, famous for its signature compact profile, economic pricing, and fuel efficiency. Upon its release in 1957, the FIAT 500 changed the compact car segment forever, and after years of trails and tribulations, the renowned FIAT 500 drives better than ever.

It's no secret that Italians embrace compact vehicles far more than Americans. Due to Europe's high gas prices and narrow cobblestone streets, they prove to be more practical. In 1957, the world of compact cars was transformed when [Dante Giacosa](#) [2] launched the [FIAT Nuova 500](#) [3]. It gained popularity not only for its unforgettable body shape, fuel efficiency, and nimble handling, but also for becoming the first true city car made specifically with the public's demands in mind.



## The History of the Novel Vehicle

It was July of 1957 when the FIAT Nuova 500 was released. Gasoline and steel were expensive in Italy at the time, and Italian automobile designer and engineer Dante Giacosa was determined to create a car that would be as minimalistic as possible. The interior was, in fact, so minimalistic that car was devoid of a turn signal lever on the steering column, and the headlights were operated via the position of the ignition key. The two-seater Nuova 500 was barely 10 feet long and 5 feet wide; however, it had room for two passengers and two suitcases. Although it is quite rare on modern automobiles, the car featured suicide doors (opening in reverse), which were relatively common during the early 20th century. The Nuova 500 was only available in one body style: a soft-top convertible. The original vehicle was powered by a 479 cc two-cylinder engine coupled to a four-speed manual gearbox. Total power output was rated at a measly 13 horsepower. For comparison, a modern lawn tractor has approximately the same power output.

By November, due to a lack of sales, the model lineup had already begun to change in order to better align itself with the demands of Italian consumers. Two new variations of the car were released: the [500 Economico](#) [4] and the [500 N Normale](#) [5]. The Economico received a 15 horsepower motor and was able to reach a top speed 55 miles per hour. The N Normale also received the same powerplant upgrade, but was given new metallic trim pieces, a rear seat, and controls for both the headlights and the turn signals on the steering column. Sales of the FIAT 500 began booming, and it became one of the most popular vehicles in Italy. New models were released throughout the 60s and 70s, during which time FIAT experimented designs that included stronger engines, soft-tops and hardtops, and other interior & exterior improvements, all while maintaining Giacosa's original styling.

Today, the 1957 FIAT 500 is a vintage piece, rising in price among collectors. It's celebrating its 60th birthday this year in July. No other automobile can truly boast popularity so long-lived as the FIAT 500.

## The Car 60 Years Later...

In 2007, FIAT reinvented their iconic car and created the modern FIAT 500 that we see on the road today. Externally, the body has taken on a sleeker and more aerodynamic form. On the inside, the dashboard resembles a 1960s radio, and its form and pastel color scheme are modeled after a retro moped. The new 500 is also equipped with modern safety features. A wide variety of powertrains and gearboxes are available and vary depending on the market of purchase (European, North American, etc...)

In 2014, FIAT decided to pay tribute to its 1957 FIAT 500 Nuova. Thus was born the "[FIAT 500 1957 Edition](#) [6]." The exterior of the car is adorned with 1957-style FIAT badges, classic-styled wheels, and your choice of one of four different retro colors. The interior of the 1957 Edition includes a [Beats Audio](#) [7] Premium Audio System™ and subtle earth toned leather-trimmed seats.

As of 2017, the FIAT 500 comes in three models, each with varying trims: the [2017 FIAT 500X](#) [8], a stylish crossover; the [2017 FIAT 500L](#) [9], which is similar to a minivan; and the original [FIAT 500](#) [10].

## FIAT Today

As of 2014, FIAT completed its acquisition of United States automaker [Chrysler](#) [11], following Chrysler's Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2009. FIAT's ownership of Chrysler gave the Italian vehicles an easy access point to the American market. Prior to 2010, FIAT cars had not been sold in the United States for 26 years. Their headquarters remains in Turin, Italy, and their factories are located around the world. FIAT additionally manages the Dodge, Jeep, Maserati, and Alfa Romeo brands.

FIAT created an automotive revolution simply by complying to popular demand and conceiving a high quality vehicle at a low price. It's no surprise over 300,000 original 1957 FIAT 500s still remain. From 1957 cobblestone streets to 2017 big cities, the FIAT 500 continues to be the perfect city car, made for the people.



**Source URL:** <http://ftp.iitaly.org/magazine/focus/art-culture/article/celebrating-60-years-iconic-vehicle-fiat-500>

### Links

- [1] <http://ftp.iitaly.org/files/fiat-500-1957-7jpg>
- [2] <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dante-Giacosa>
- [3] <http://www.caranddriver.com/features/fiat-topolino-the-original-500-archived-feature>
- [4] <http://www.amicidella500.it/datiec.html>
- [5] <http://classicfiat500.co.uk/fiat-500-history-2/>
- [6] <http://www.fiatusa.com/en/500/1957/>
- [7] <https://www.beatsbydre.com/beats-audio>
- [8] <http://www.fiatusa.com/500x.html?sid=1037056&KWNM=2017+fiat+500x&KWID=43700016810007282&TR=1&channel=paidsearch&gclid=CODjm8Wrg9ICFV5MDQod6SUK0w>
- [9] <http://www.fiatusa.com/500l.html>
- [10] <http://www.fiatusa.com/500.html>
- [11] <http://chrysler.com>