



NL SF-SG-89

AW*360 NW

#63

Fiat
Cinquecento
Soleil
(1997)

Vitesse
V095C

Period: 1991-1998

Built: 1,164,525

Engine: 900cc 4-cyl.

Power: 37 PS

Top speed: 140 km/h

Price: fl. 16,995

Predecessor:

Fiat 126

Successor:

Fiat Seicento

Date acquisition:

07/09/1997

Approx. first plate Approx. last plate

FR-BB-51 XV-NH-52



FIAT



gli anni novanta



By the late 1980s Fiat's smallest cars – the 126 and Panda – started to feel quite outdated. Despite the Panda's continued popularity, Fiat introduced the Cinquecento – Italian for “500” – as the successor of the 126 in 1991. Although no one at Fiat would have anticipated that the Panda would outlive the Cinquecento by as much as five years, the Cinquecento can be seen as a commercial success in its own right: more than one million were built in the Polish factory in Tychy where until the introduction of the Cinquecento the Polski Fiat 126 had been built. Alongside the Renault Twingo, introduced a year later, the Cinquecento helped to give a boost to the city car class (the “A” segment) that over the 1980s had been dominated by Japanese car makers (e.g. Suzuki Alto; Daihatsu Cuore) and by the early 1990s had been either abandoned by European manufacturers (e.g. Renault 4) or never even pursued. Opel's, Volkswagen's and Ford's smallest cars – the Corsa, Polo, and Fiesta, respectively – were “superminis” from the B-segment.

Although not perhaps as adorable as the 500 and Panda, in my view the Cinquecento, with its distinctive vertical tailgate and clean lines, can do justice to Fiat's long heritage of small cars. In fact, with its all-important name – spelled out in full as opposed to represented numerically – the Cinquecento had very large boots to fill. The Autocar article written around the time of its first public unveiling (issue 18 December 1991), asked if the Cinquecento was “worthy of the name”. It noted that “twice, a Fiat 500 has become legendary in Italian motoring” making it a prerequisite that the Cinquecento “has a beguiling personality” and a “fascination that goes way beyond its size, specification or prize”. On first impressions, the car lived up to the high expectations, as the Cinquecento was judged to be “a terrific baby car, cheeky to drive, far more comfortable than any previous mini, sufficiently roomy for four adults, even quiet, with decisive handling and (...) reasonable performance combined with frugal economy”, although the exterior styling was characterized as somewhat “predictable” and reminiscent of the Lancia Y10.

The car in my collection is a “Soleil” version with retractable fabric roof, colourful interior fabrics, and in sunny lime green. Alongside the racy Sporting version, the Soleil proved a popular choice for those looking for a characterful city car.



The Cinquecento name is a direct reference to its infamous predecessors.



The Cinquecento replaced the ageing Fiat 126. It was produced in the same factory where the last 126s were produced.



The Twingo and Cinquecento marked European car makers' reignited interest in the so-called A-segment.