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Colour-coded Turbo badges a nice touch.

THERE was a time when the only things on the road that were stylish and fast, were highwaymen. But times have changed and, whilst the Fiat Coupé is without doubt one of the most stylish cars on the road today, you won't need to hold up a stagecoach to buy one.

Take the reins of the 20V Turbo version, and you'll find it's easy enough to tame. Yet with five cylinders, 20 valves and 219 horses more than Dick Turpin had, on the gallop there is little around that can keep up with it.

And when you do finally pull up, the Coupé will stand and deliver admiring looks all day long. From the slashes across the top of the wheelarches to the beautiful little details – like the alloy filler cap, deep-set rear light pods and discrete Pininfarina badges – everything works in harmony to create an alluring and powerful impression.

This Italian exotic, with its timeless looks, is surely destined for classic status now that Fiat have seen fit to end Coupé production, and its ultimate incarnation – the 20V Turbo – is the one to have. The

initial gremlins which some owners found with the Coupé, seem predominantly to have affected just the earlier 16V models.

And while, of course, many will buy the Coupé purely for its stunning looks and driving pleasure, the 20V Turbo is remarkably practical too as an everyday beast. It's effortless around town, will seat four adults in comfort, and even has a fair size boot. Best of all, with a good condition 1996 car costing around just £7000, you won't need to rob the rich to buy one.

DRIVING

This car looks, and feels, special from the moment you sit in it. The seats, be they velour or optional leather, are both comfortable and supportive, and the stylish and chunky leather steering wheel feels wonderful. The retro-feel dashboard, with its Pininfarina-badged metal surround, is colour-coded and the analogue dials are clear and easy to see. Even the door handles feel delightful, and the heating and ventilation controls are

big, easy to use and – perhaps surprisingly for a Fiat – feel really solid.

Six-footers have nothing to fear either, as there is plenty of space in the front, good headroom and, with the steering wheel being adjustable for reach and rake, no need to have your knees up around your ears.

Fire up the five-cylinder 20-valve turbocharged engine and there is little to give away the latent power lurking within. Compared to the normally-aspirated 20V version, the five-cylinder growl is somewhat muted, but even at high speeds the engine is remarkably quiet, save for the whistle of the turbo.

The gear lever is reasonably long, but fortunately the throw is quite short, and the gear changes are almost effortless. It really feels like an important car, with precise steering and a ride balanced perfectly between sharp handling and supple comfort.

Although it's a pussycat off-boost in traffic, you need to take a bit of care at high speeds in the wet. This car certainly flies, and the 0-60 times don't tell the real story. In a straight line, from



Interior is a lovely place to be, with or without leather. Seats are supportive, and the steering wheel is one of the best we've handled. Metal fascia is wonderfully retro.

50-100mph (on autobahns of course!) there is little on the road that could keep up. But 220bhp is a lot to lay down through the front wheels, and the chassis can struggle to cope on the limit, with torque steer prevalent. The only slight let down is the braking – the standard brakes struggle at speed and many owners have opted for uprated pads and sometimes disks as well. But new pads are cheaper than new front bumpers!

Practicality-wise, the Coupé is easy to live with on a day-to-day basis, and the boot is big for a coupé. The car does have quite a big turning circle, but in practice, sensitive power-steering means this isn't often a problem. However, judging the rear-end when reversing isn't easy – so use the mirrors. Also, while rear passengers have plenty of headroom, they will struggle for legroom if long-legged front seat passengers have the seats pushed right back.

OWNING

The Fiat Coupé has performed badly in *JD Power* surveys, with many owners apparently unhappy with 'minor' interior and exterior trim problems and poor customer service at dealerships. However, owners tell us that most problems seem to relate to the earlier 16V versions, and not the 1997-on 20V cars. And as there are plenty of Fiat specialists around, there's no need to risk potentially poor main dealer service.

Most servicing costs are actually not too bad, for a car with this kind of performance, and the engine, gearbox and clutch have generally proved trouble-free.

Main service intervals are 12,000 miles, but we'd recommend changing the oil every 6000 to be on the safe side, especially if you do frequent short journeys of the stop-start variety.

The 60,000-mile cambelt change service, however, is seriously expensive – an incredible £1200 at a main dealer – as the engine has to come out, although some specialists would say otherwise.

Some parts prices are cheap –

especially items seen in other Fiat models like spark plugs, others – including brake pads and disks – are expensive. The 205/50 tyres aren't too pricey, but that's just as well because a set of fronts might only last you 8000 miles!

Fuel economy is very good for this class of car, with a combined figure of around 28mpg possible. Needless to say, this will fall rapidly to around 18mpg if severely trashed.

Insurance isn't for the faint-hearted, or for the young. Expect to pay around £600-700 for a 40 year-old with full NCB, but nearer £1500 for a 25 year-old with 50% NCB. Strangely, for a sports car like this, owners don't seem to be clubby types and there's no official Coupé owners club. Which is a shame, because these cars should be good for 100K-plus miles, and are virtually guaranteed to become classics.

BUYING

Finding a car shouldn't prove too much of a headache, and most, but not all, will have been well cared-for. Owners tend to

“With five cylinders, 20 valves and 219 horses more than Dick Turpin, on the gallop there's little that can keep up with the 20V Turbo”



Front headlamp clusters can be costly.

Pininfarina design means superb detailing, like alloy filler cap and deep-set lights.



Not a lot of room in here, so no surprise that cambelt change is an engine-out job.





LIFE WITH A FIAT COUPE

I'VE OWNED my R-reg 20V Turbo since 1998, and covered 24,000 miles. It's bigger than it looks, so you have to take care when parking, otherwise you can curb the wheels.

I love the gearchange, and it's deceptively fast, so watch out for speed cameras! I actually prefer the non-turbo 20V because you can hear the engine working, but I couldn't get one in Sprint Blue, so I bought a Turbo. I love the way other Coupé owners always wave back, and my wife loves it so much she claims it is her car! My only dislike is the poor brakes, which mean slowing down and gearchanging must be planned well in advance. Overall, I can't think of anything as stylish to replace it with yet, except perhaps a Maserati 3200GT. **Phil Ward, Editor of Auto Italia magazine.**

cherish them – it's just that kind of car. And to be honest we've never seen a dirty one on the road, have you?

Main dealers have quite a few cars, but most are priced a bit above book price. However, you do get the peace of mind that only a main dealer one year warranty can really provide.

There are some good independent Coupé specialists around too, like the Wimbledon Carriage Company, and there are cars at non-specialist dealers as well – just check out *Exchange & Mart*.

If it's a private car you're after, look no further than the *AutoTrader* website – a recent UK-wide trawl revealed over 40 examples. A few Coupés do come up at auction as well but, if you go this route, a full Fiat service book and warranted miles are a must.

Apart from the usual things to watch out for, check out the door panels, as these tend to dent easily, front tyres take a hammering so inspect the tread and look for an even wear pattern, and take a good look at the exhaust – it isn't built to last and tail pipes, in particular, corrode early. Also inspect alloys for any signs of curb-related damage.

Check older cars for any early signs of rust and try out every single switch – despite an exaggeratedly poor image, electrical faults are not unknown. The mechanicals are pretty robust, and a proper vehicle inspection should reveal any hidden accident damage.

As we've mentioned, the 60,000-mile cambelt change is very expensive indeed, so budget for this if the car you're looking at is anywhere close to this mileage.

Sprint Blue is the most popular colour for 20V Turbos, followed by yellow, red, silver and the darker metallics. With one eye on re-sale, we'd say avoid a yellow car, and the really dark 'Ink Black' metallic will look dirty quickly.

Security-wise, the standard immobiliser system is fine but, as we've said insurance ain't cheap – so make sure you really can afford the premiums before you splash out your hard-earned wedge on the car.



Most colours are okay, but avoid yellow as you'll limit your market come resale time.

FIAT COUPÉ 20V TURBO MODEL HISTORY

December 1996 2.0-litre 20V Turbo Coupé launched to replace 2.0-litre 16V. Front-wheel drive with independent suspension, electric mirrors, tinted glass and 16in alloys. PAS, ABS, horizontally slatted grille, high level rear brake light, revised interior with new heating and audio controls. Available as five-speed manual only. **July 1998** special edition six-speed LE Turbo launched with red Brembo brakes. **August 1999** Turbo Plus launched with colour-keyed body kit, recaro seats and black leather upholstery, aircon and six-speed manual gearbox standard on all Turbos. **January 2001** production ceased.

PARTS PRICES (98S 20V TURBO INCL VAT)

Autotalia Epsom (01372 744444)

Exhaust back box	£386.29
Brakepads (front)	£89.33
Brakepads (rear)	£57.84
Brake disks (front)	£115.36 each
Spark plugs	£5.73 each
Air filter	£11.71
Oil filter	£8.27
Fuel filter	£10.08

Servicing (Coupers 01727 854342)

12,000 mile service	£115
36,000 mile service	£150
60,000 miles service	£1200*

* Involves cam belt change and recommended engine removal

TYPICAL 20V TURBO COUPE PRICES

Year	Retail	Private
1996	£8000 to £6500	£7200 to £5800
1997	£9500 to £8000	£8600 to £6700
1998	£10,500 to £9300	£9700 to £7600
1999	£12,300 to £10,000	£11,700 to £9100
2000	£15,500 to £14,000	£14,300 to £11,600

Turbo Plus adds approximately £1000
LE adds approximately £1600

TECH SPEC 20V TURBO

cc/cyl 4/1998 bhp/220 mph/155 0-60/6.5 mpg/28.0 Ins grp/18 Length/13ft 11in Width/5ft 10in Height/4ft 4in

CONTACTS

Fiat UK www.fiat.com 0800 717000

Independent specialists:

Autotalia Magazine www.auto-italia.co.uk

Wimbledon Carriage Company 020 8540 9581 (www.wimbledoncarriage.co.uk)

Parts and servicing:

L&M 01494 538899 (www.l-m.co.uk)

Autotalia Epsom 01372 744444