

Fiat 500 on Steroids



Following on from the tremendous success of the Mini, Tamiya has launched another so-called M-chassis car, the Fiat Abarth 1000 TCR Berlina Corsa. Two things struck me on receiving the car: firstly that the name was longer than the car, and secondly, wasn't TCR a slightly dubious slot car system of the early '80s where two cars raced and a third wandered round aimlessly getting in the way? So, is the new Fiat likely to be a success, or will it be the jam car? Read on and find out.

Reviewed by
Steve Rouse

A Car With
Attitude!



Fiat Abarth

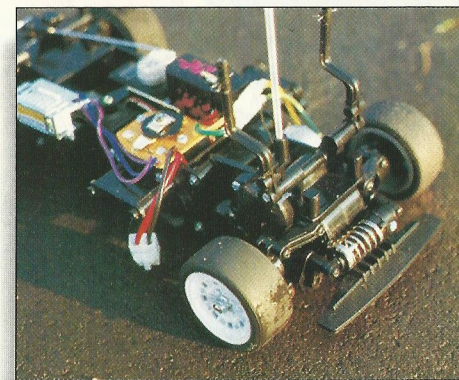
The Fiat is a truly nostalgic car. Back in the '50s and '60s Fiat made a tiny city car called the 500, it had 17bhp and as such it struggled to pull the skin off a rice pudding. A tuning company called Abarth saw a market and persuaded Fiat that the 500 could be a whole lot more fun with a bit more poke. So, in various stages the car was uprated to the one you see here, which has a 1000 cc engine, modified bodywork and suspension and the curious raised engine cover, more of which anon. At the end of development the car was more than a match for anything Ambrosia had to offer, and was a sort of Italian Mini Cooper.

I said at the start that the Fiat is based on the Mini, and because of this almost all of the components are, indeed, exactly the same. But here's the big difference: whereas the British car is front engine and front wheel driven, the Italian car is rear engine and rear drive. Confused? No need. The reason for such dramatic platform changes without any component changes is quite straightforward; the front and rear of the car are enormously similar.

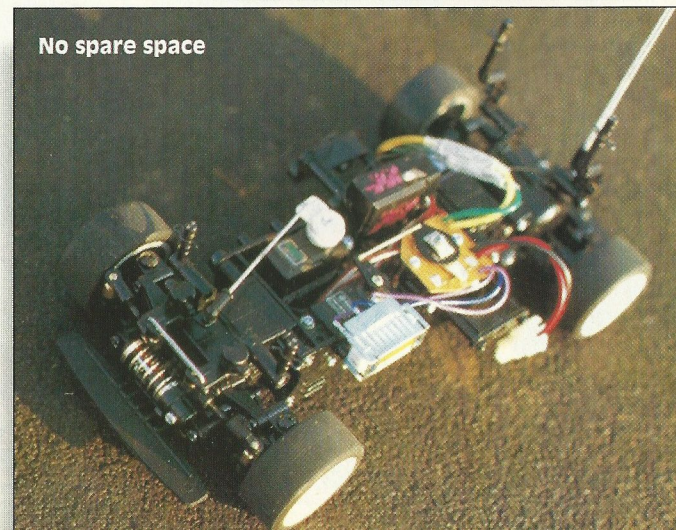
The gearbox, now bolted to the rear, contains the conventional planetary gear differential a lay shaft and spur gear, and a small idler gear: though in order to make the gearbox more compact, the spur gear and idler have been transposed, meaning that the pinion meshes with a very small gear indeed; although there's no excessive noise. The gearbox internals are easily accessible after

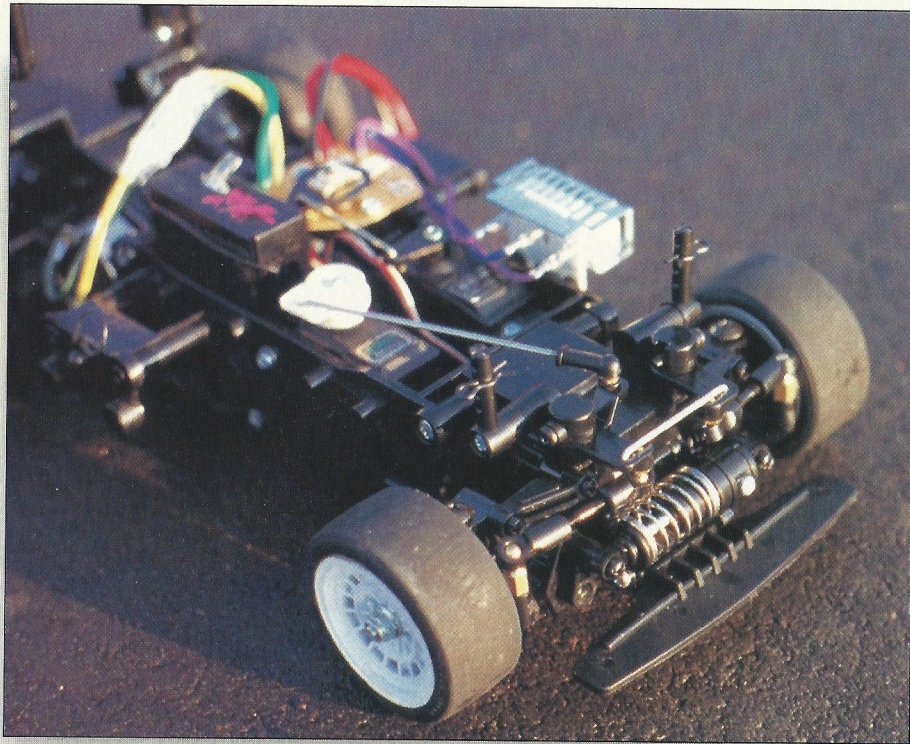
the removal of two screws, and the gearcover, as can be seen in the photos, while removal of the differential requires only a little more effort.

The rear suspension is a double wishbone affair, each wishbone bolted to the gearbox, and a simple oil free damper interconnects the lower wishbones. The dampers, though basic, are actually fairly effective: the piston shaft is a long screw, the head of which acts as the piston by interference fitting a section of rubber tube contained within the damper. After a drop of oil has been applied, the screw slides up and down the tube in a very smooth manner so that the car is ideal on smooth surfaces. Being monoshock, the car needs a degree of roll control, and this is supplied by a pair of small springs clamped 'twixt' lower wishbone and gearbox - again, simple but surprisingly effective. dummy The front end of the car is almost a mirror image of the rear: a gearbox is bolted to the front of the chassis and the wishbones and damper are hung from it. This means that the car has exactly the same suspension geometry at both ends - including the spring and roll



No spare space





clear film which protects the outside of the shell from overspray, which is a particularly useful. Also included is a sheet of masking tape with the window outlines printed on it, so you don't have to struggle with a roll of tape. Due to the highly detailed nature of the shell, every seam and window frame have been accurately reproduced - and this causes occasional problems during the masking process: you must ensure that the tape adheres perfectly, or some unpleasant sticky dribbles could occur!

The rather intricate engine/cover/support assembly is manufactured out of injection moulded plastic, and is assembled in much the same way as a plastic kit. The whole lot is attached to the body by servo tape and, I reckon, will be the first target as soon as the car hits the track; though to be fair it feels fairly sturdy.

Is It Any Good?

Right, enough of this building and painting rubbish, is it any good? Well, it's a bit of a laugh, to be honest... I think, like many people, I poked fun at the Mini when it was launched earlier this year - but that was before I saw one, or rather around ten, racing at the Eurocup opener at Basildon. Yes, the Mini is fab, surprisingly agile and really rather nippy - even with the standard 540 motor - and as the Fiat contains the same ingredients, the final dish is much the same. Interestingly, the Fiat has very soft Super Slick rear tyres, so perhaps my Porsche analogy was correct - though sadly I have been unable to try any different rears.

The car was tried at the super Bedworth track near Nuneaton where it coped rather well: it certainly puts its power down well, and because of the light weight it accelerates quickly. The only problems arose when I went a bit over the top and installed a 14 turn motor... Suddenly the car was an enormous handful: it wandered on the straight and snaked like a kipper under any kind of deceleration, but it was so fast, and to be honest powering out of corners was very controllable - if a bit lurid!

Conclusions

So, to sum up: if you want to have a whole lot of fun then go and buy a Fiat or a Mini and race it, either at your local club, or in the 1996 Eurocup where the only mods allowed are a set of balltraces - you even have to run the standard speedo... See you out there. Seriously.

The Fiat is available from many particularly stylish and discerning model shop outlets.

Mean and magnificent.



stiffness - and as there is substantially more weight at the rear of the car, we might have a Porsche 911 scenario: tail out action! The steering set-up on the Fiat is very simple in operation and acts forward of the front axle line. As the steering is straight from the Mini the lock is okay but not enormous, and there is a large amount of play in the system - though the castor angle should ensure straight running.

Included in the kit, as is the norm from Tamiya, are a 540 motor and a 3-step forward and reverse speed controller for ease of use if

this is your first venture into the world of model cars.

Assembly is simplicity itself - it took me two hours before the chassis was blasting around the house. Firstly, build the gearbox and hang the suspension from it. Then build the dummy gearbox and bolt the suspension onto that. Next, screw the two halves of the chassis together and bolt on the front and rear, and then fit the electric's no problem.

The longest job on any Tamiya scale car is painting the bodyshell, and in this respect the Fiat is no different - it took hours. You will probably have noticed that the colour scheme of the review car is rather different to that of the box lid. In my eyes, and I believe that I am not alone, the standard paint job is not very exciting; it's a bit...erm...well...grey isn't it? With the car having a kind of love it or loath it shape, a boring colour scheme does it no favours at all, so I thought I'd liven things up a bit. The new paint job is still based on a real race car though, it's the BMW 318 iS in which newly crowned Japanese Touring Car Champion Steve Soper, and Jo Winklehook, won the Spa 24hrs race in 1995. The general consensus is that the car looks much better, and many opinions concerning the shape have been changed. As with much of the Tamiya range, the body shell of the Fiat is covered in a

