

# A sting with a tale

*Motor  
Madness*

**Ian Lamming** revels in the talents of a car with a scorpion badge

**W**HAT'S my favourite car? What would I buy if I won the lottery? What's the best car on the road pound for pound?

The Abarth 595. The Abarth 595. The Abarth 595.

The Abarth 595 is one of the reasons I am a very happy man. There is no other car at any price that puts a smile the size of this one on my face. The fact it is only £20k is as irrelevant as it is welcome and this is why.

I want for nothing because the Abarth 595 provides everything I want. Even my nine-year-old notices my deep affection for this little icon.

"Daddy, you really love this car don't you," he says, perceptively, especially when I always start it with the driver's door open and blip the throttle to hear the symphony of the twin exhausts.

"If he had seen me pat the steering wheel and beam as it transported me over The Stang, from Teesdale to Arkengarthdale, he would have seen confirmation personified.

So, to the uninitiated, what is an Abarth 595 and why do I own one?

Mr Abarth was a racing driver in the 1950s and since then his specialist workshop has been taking a variety of craft, from Ferraris and Maseratis to humble Fiats, on which his technicians have worked their magic.

In this case they take a Fiat 500 and completely rebuild it. The motor in my Turismo version is a 165bhp, 1.4 litre four cylinder, fitted with a Garret turbo-charger and BMC air filter, in a body that weighs about the same as dust.

There's your power to weight ratio sorted then and it will hit 60mph in under seven seconds – nice, just like the engine itself which has a painted rocker cover sporting the scorpion branding.

Gorgeous 17in alloys house super-powerful drilled and ventilated discs with painted callipers, behind which are superb Koni rear shockers. I've had three Abarths, this is the best yet mainly because the ride is so much better at the back.

Then there's the attention to detail such as the deep honeycomb grille that spells out 'Abarth', the scorpion badges (there is no Fiat branding to be seen) front, rear and on the flanks, the alloy petrol and oil filler caps, complete with scorpions of course, the twin chrome tailpipes set in a black diffuser, the brushed alloy mirror caps.

Inside there are delightful leather sports seats, drilled alloy pedals, touch screen and a turbo pressure meter. There's a decent infotainment centre that Bluetooths to your phone. It sounds great but not as amazing as the exhaust note.

There are many hot-hatches that on paper seem to better the Abarth, but somehow they don't. The balance is there; the right amount of power, with stupendous ride and road holding, stunning feedback through the flat-bottomed chunky leather steering wheel, the noise, the feel, everything is perfect, as are the looks.

Normal 500 is cute, retro, cheeky and endearing. Abarth flares wheel arches and sills, drops airdams and diffusers, adds a rear spoiler, making 595 aggressive and sporty. It somehow looks retro but contemporary as well. It is low slung and looks fast and purposeful even at rest.

On the move it is a joy to drive; nothing else is this much fun at any price. But if you need to hit the motorways it's fine too because you sit high up and there are the creature comforts and 40+mpg you need to travel far and wide.

My Turismo comes with the paddle-shift, five speed, robotized, sequential gearbox. There is no lever anywhere to be seen just buttons on the dash; one for 1<sup>st</sup>, one for reverse, another for auto/manual.

There's another on the dash with 'sport' written on it. This is the button which distorts the space/time continuum. The steering weights up, the engine goes ballistic, the dash goes red and menacing and a G-meter pops up on the display – oh yeah...

The Abarth also has a cult following, a group of discerning best kept secret keepers and boasts masses of kudos among those in the know. Even myriad 500 drivers nod in deference and envy to the Abarth – who's the daddy? The Abarth is.

On an event with Aston Martin, a stunt driver on the James Bond movies asked me what I drove when I wasn't testing cars. "An Abarth 595," I said proudly. He smiled, nodded his approval and replied: "Oh yeah, now you are talking."

He then recalled a wet track day he attended when an Abarth left a gaggle of genuine super-cars in its spray.

That's the measure of this little car; it's my favourite, my lottery car and pound for pound the best car on the road.

## Fact File

- Abarth 595 Turismo
- Engine: 1.4 petrol with Garret turbo and high performance BMC air intake
- Power: 165PS
- 0-62mph: 7.2 secs
- Top speed: 136mph
- Combined MPG: 47.1
- Transmission: Five speed robotized sequential with paddleshift
- CO2 g/km: 139

