

Mud plugger causes a stir

Ian Lamming drives the endearing new Fiat Panda Cross

Fact File

Fiat Panda Cross

Engine: 1.3 diesel

Power: 80PS

0-62mph: 14.3

Top speed: 99mph

Combined miles per gallon: 60.1

Transmission: six speed manual

Insurance: 9U-T2

CO2 g/km: 124

HERE'S a knock on the window and a slightly coy looking shopper motions for me to drop the glass. "Sorry to bother you love, I don't normally do this, but I love your car. What's it like?" she asks. "I'm thinking of changing mine. Do you know where I can get one."

My answer is simple, indefatigable, clear. "Buy one, it's great." That's the power of this endearing, charming and capable SUV, the Fiat Panda Cross.

Cross is a pumped up version of the Panda 4x4 and is simply brilliant. In bright yellow and with its distinctive nose job it can't fail to catch the eye and the imagination. The style makeover is perfect, makes it look even chunkier, even more purposeful, even more appealing.

Bash plates front and rear finish off perfectly the off-road rugged good looks and glorious alloys, fitted with superb all-weather tyres are perfect companions.

Panda may be a city car but Cross has most definitely been built for the countryside.

It is perfection personified on the narrow lanes of North

Yorkshire and Cumbria. Its height gives you the feel of an SUV but its squared off nature and modest proportions make it more manageable on the straight and narrow.

The front gets a very smart moulded bumper that wraps around the bonnet and houses very neat lights and alloy-look bash plate. The rear gets similar off-road aesthetics. Fantastic ride and super steering make the Cross as good to drive as it is to look at and the excellent 4WD makes it a proper off-roader.

Turn the knob on the transmission tunnel once and power is sent to all four wheels instead of just the front. But better than that it also switches around the torque to the wheels with the most grip – very sophisticated.

Turn it again and it introduces hill descent control which allows you to tackle some pretty demanding descents without any fear of control running away – impressive stuff and normally associated with upmarket off-roaders. The appeal spreads inside with a dashboard that is distinctive, very attractive and functional. The little mud-plugger really is the most endearing of cars. No wonder it causes such a stir in the supermarket car park.

