

modern

# MOTOR

SEPTEMBER 1981

\*\$1.75

NZ \$2.25

EXCLUSIVE TEST:

## THE COMMODORE 4 THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN

— and why  
you can't  
buy it

### BATHURST

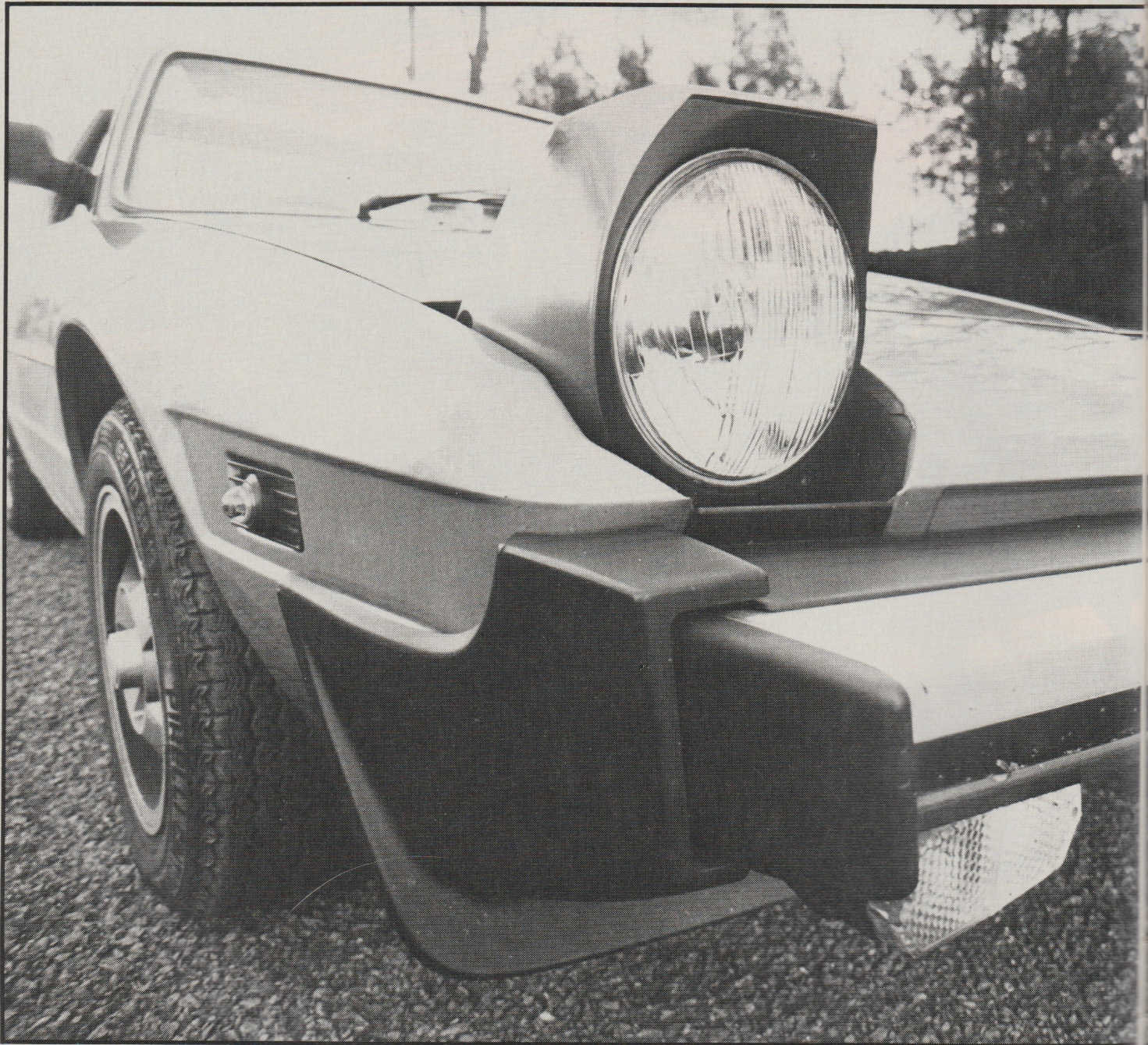
Johnson, Brock,  
Moffat & Bartlett  
talk about  
the race,  
themselves  
& each other

PLUS  
CAPRICE vs LTD  
The Kings Compared

All-new CELICA — first photos

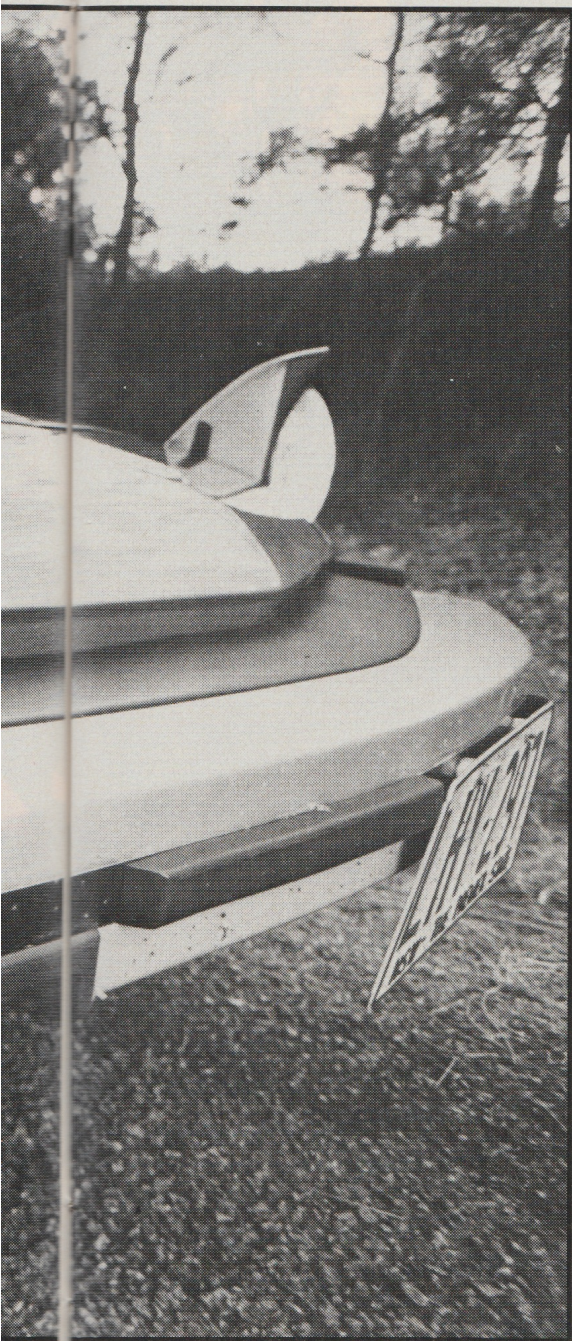


**X-1**  
*Fiv*





19  
ive speed



# Fiat first

*It's a fate worse than death if your feet don't fit the Fiat X1/9 1500. But if it is your size, fasten your belts and come for a ride.*

**T**HE ROAD is squeaky-clean with a soft-focus haze of mist whispering above the surface. The X1/9's discs click as it stops at a set of lights. The yellow glow of early morning sun is blotted out as a Corolla towers alongside with the driver bobbing up and down in the seat to try and see the Five-speed badge on the rear of a Fiat that hardly comes up to his doors.

Can he be so observant that he's spotted a car he knows hasn't been released or is the Bertone body still a jaw-dropper after nearly 10 years in production?

The lights change and we move off, alone in the morning. The Fiat runs sweetly from 2500 to 5000 in each gear from one to four. Five is saved for longer straights and a lack of the law.

The Corolla struggles and drops behind. Now he can get a clear view on the new badge, the only outward sign of a new model.

The River Road twists right through a trough and hard right through a crest, over a railway line and right-angle left at the junction.

Up and down, the gearbox slices each slot with precision. The lever is spring-biased to 3-4. It would be better to have a box arranged with a 2-3 direct-line bias for hard-fun city driving. Four is too tall for swift city roads and two a power delight from right-angle junctions.

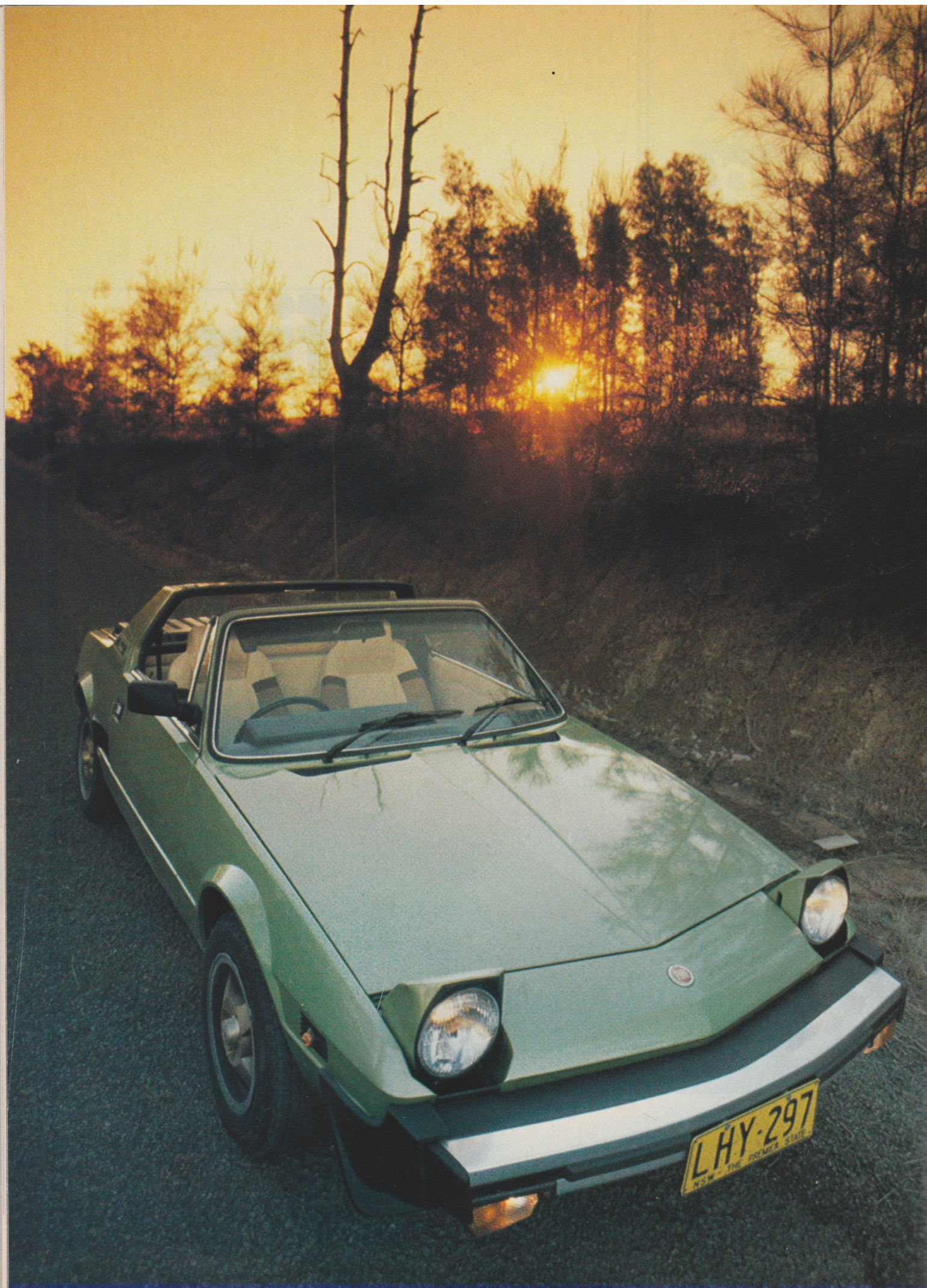
The River Road passes faster underneath. No longer is the X1/9 a chassis in search of a motor and gearbox. With the 1300 motor and four-speed box it was. Now the only two things wrong have been changed.

It's hard to imagine how 0.2 of a litre and one more gear (with a few other ratios shuffled around to suit) can transform a car so profoundly.

All that stopped the old X1/9 from being brilliant has been fixed. Now it is brilliant. A sports car. A car that will handle and generate huge sideways G-forces.

Stop for fuel before a run into the country. A Civic pulls in behind. The driver doesn't care for the driver of the Fiat. That's obvious. But she notices the X1/9 and slowly strokes its lines







with her eyes. She knows that it costs more than her Civic. She doesn't know what it costs. She can't afford it, but she could easily afford the man who could.

The 49 litre tank is filled and driver's eyes meet and agree they never will again. In a matter of seconds the X1/9 is headed for roads that twist like a politician's tongue and duck and swoop with emotion. Places to drive and remember what fun it was to drive when it was fun to drive.

It fits. The seat snuggles closely. Some years ago a cartoon in an American magazine showed a flat-capped driver sitting in a 'funny little furrin' car' talking up to the salesperson. He said "It's a bit tight on the instep."

The X1/9 is designed for a 1791 mm tall person with a size 7½ B foot. Any more (like Editor McKay who bumps his head on telegraph wires) and the car simply doesn't fit. Well, not comfortably. It is possible to sit, knees askew, and shuffle the steering wheel, but that's eliminating half the fun.

On paper the engine changes are minimal — an increase of a few millimetres here and a few kilowatts there transforms itself into response and power that feels totally different from the old engine.

Capacity increase has been achieved by stroking, not boring, and increasing the compression ratio. Compression is up from 8.9 to 9.2 and stroke extends from 55.5 to 63.9. The twin choke down draught Weber gets another two millimetres taking it to 34 mm and a new exhaust system gets the gasses out faster without increasing noise levels too much.

But the X1/9 still has the delightful Fiat bark from the exhaust. Subtle (this is 1981) but present when road conditions, and traffic, let you enjoy it.

Torque is up too. Only 17 Nm, but enough to complement the slightly longer-stroke feeling of the motor. Actually, the power increase is tangible throughout the rev range, not simply at the top, or when the car is being screwed to the

wall. It has changed the character of the engine from one that has to be driven hard to one that can be pottered about under 3500 without feeling sluggish or puny.

It's flexible when you want it to be flexible, responsive when revved hard and a high revver when that's needed too.

Oddly, gearbox ratio changes aren't dramatic either, yet the ratios are superb. First, second and third remain the same as the old model. Four rises numerically from 0.959 to 1.042 and fifth rates 0.863 to 1.

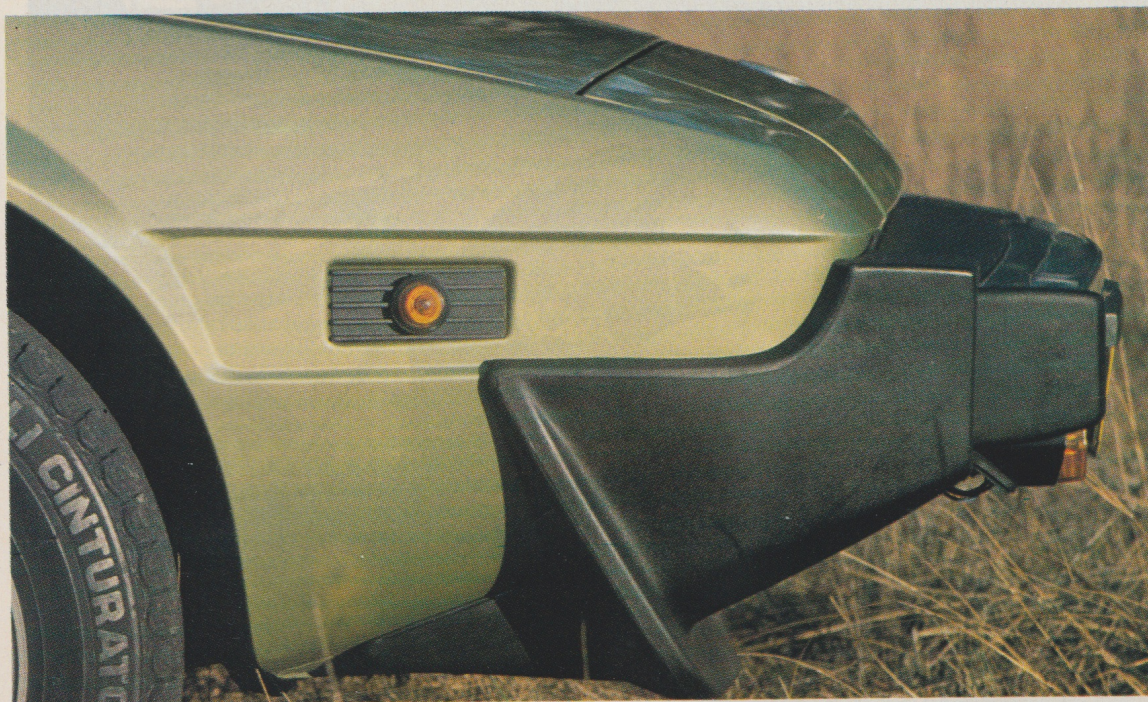
It's pleasant to see the Fiat X1/9 develop properly, not in the Japanese tradition. Occasionally, the faults on a Japanese car are transparent and yet you know they're only going to be changed one at a time so the maker has a greater number of so-called new models. Fiat could have left the 1300 motor in the X1/9 and added a five-speed box, or increased motor size and left the four-speed box. Either way, the car would have improved. With both changes, the improvements have all but eliminated any criticism from the engine and transmission combination.

Clutch size is up by 9 mm to 190 mm. It's light and positive. The gearchange is swift and precise although a slightly shorter throw would be better. No, perfect.

Fuel economy doesn't matter. Just as well. The test car was plagued with lumpy fuel. Fortunately Fiat Service Division showed us how to remove and clean the main jets on the Weber — it takes less than two minutes — so the few occasions we had to clean out the carburettor didn't present real hassles.

The lumpy petrol isn't a car fault, it's fast becoming known as Sydney fuel strike disease.

Economy varied. The worst we managed was a shade short of 9.4 litres/100 km (30 mpg) and the best a tad better than 7.0 litres/100 km (40 mpg). Average was 7.74 litres/100 km (around 36.5 mpg), and that's brilliant for a car that will wind out to 180 km/h and drop a standing 400 in less than 18 seconds.





*Bertone's ingenious design offers everything that opens and shuts (right). Cockpit (below) is a snug fit for those of average stature and height, but a shade too tight for drivers built on more generous lines.*



Show these figures to the next person who says that weight and aerodynamics play little part in fuel efficiency.

It's time to wax lyrical.

Suspension, roadhandling, braking, steering. No greater praise can be given to the X1/9 than to call it a two-door Sud. Just as the Alfa Sud, when it first appeared, changed the definition of the word 'stability', so does the X1/9. The two cars achieve their goal, approaching perfection, in different ways — one front-drive front engine, the other mid-engine rear drive — but the feeling is very similar. Razor sharp steering and wheel-to-road stability that makes the steering worthwhile.

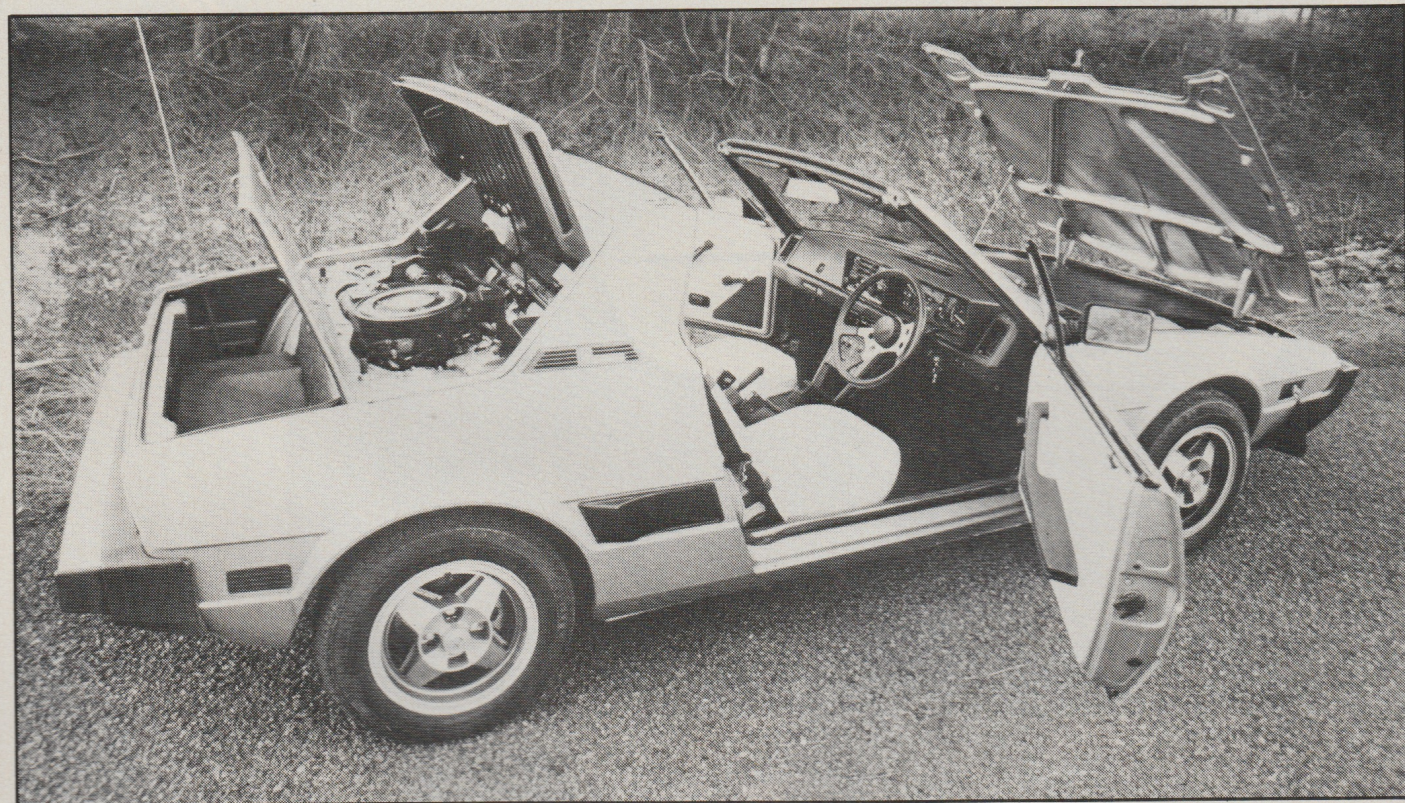
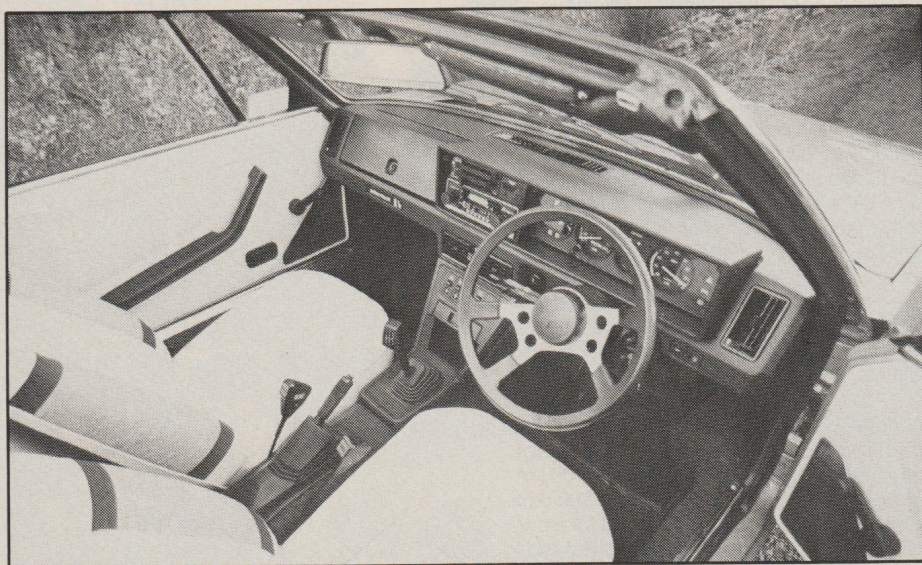
It was possible to generate lateral forces that almost had eyeballs falling out of their sockets. The side-hugging seats and the left-foot rest both make sense when you start pushing the X1/9 hard through smooth corners. Rough corners can throw it off line, but the steering responds instantly to any change of direction. When it finally lets go, both ends go together (on the rear slightly earlier) in the gentlest and most controllable of slides. At this speed the driver is half-past cuckoo, or positively dangerous.

The four discs are slightly heavier than the brakes we've become used to — they don't have a booster and don't need them. Raw brakes, or brakes in the raw. Manual brakes, not automatic. Strong, progressive and fade free. The pedal is small though.

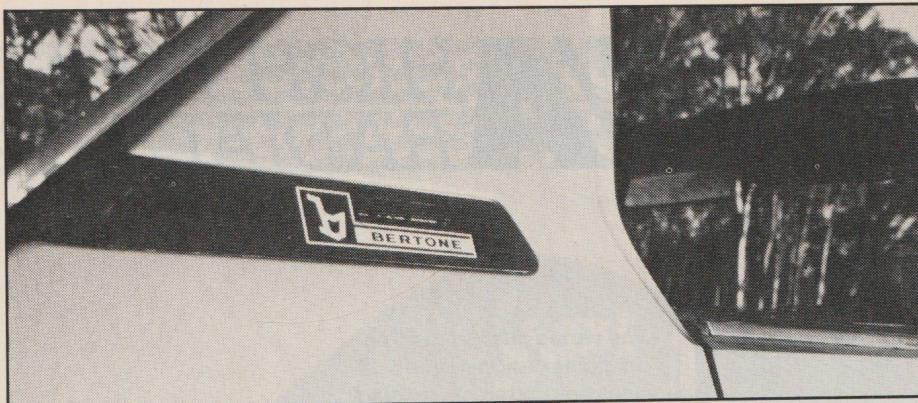
Ride is firm. Over rough roads, very firm. On smooth roads, brilliant. On rough roads, not quite so brilliant. Fiat makes tractors for dirt-roads. The X1/9 is not a tractor.

Aerodynamics play a strong part in the X1/9. This fact proves that something efficient can also look good. It also proves that a clean car is a quiet car. Wind noise is very low. Buffeting is almost non-existent with the windows down and roof in place and mildly exciting with the roof removed.

Luggage space, for what it's worth, is very







good. There's space for overnight bags in the rear boot and space for quite large suitcases in the front luggage locker. The spare tyre is stowed vertically behind the driver's seat and kept clean and neat with a velcro-edged covering.

Controls are neat and functional. The only annoying control is the flashing handbrake light which is mercifully hidden by the steering wheel. Everything else is oddly Fiat — you get

used to the headlight switching system — and a few days in the driver's seat has you operating everything by touch. No need to look. Just as it should be.

In fact, that's what the X1/9 is all about. Tactile pleasures. Touch, feel, response, sound. The sort of sound that comes through your fingertips at the same time as it reaches your ears.

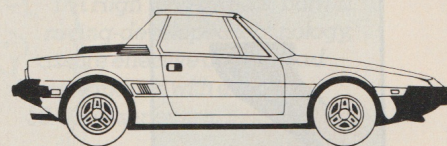
Only our occasional correspondent Hugh Anchor would dare use the words which could justify the unmitigated pleasure of driving the X1/9 and driving it hard. It's an extension of your dreams; a growth on your limbs and senses which responds to every fantasy you ever had about driving quickly and safely. Surely, the X1/9 must be one of the fastest point-to-point cars in Australia — given the archaic speed laws.

We managed a run to 180 km/h and the engine was still willing to run harder. If the X1/9 could red-line in fifth it would run to 205 km/h, or so. Given a long hill and a smooth, safe surface and it probably would run to red-line.

And the price? Well, it's around \$13,800. Say 14 grand quickly and you'll never notice the difference. Is this expensive? No. Most definitely not. Given Fiat's other factory ownership, a badge change could take place without upsetting the other factory, because the X1/9 is good enough to wear *any* badge.

At \$14,000 it's an expensive Fiat. At \$14,000 it would be a bargain Ferrari. □

### FIAT X1/9 1500 ROAD TEST DATA (as tested)



#### ENGINE

Location	Mid, transverse
Cylinders	Four, in-line
Bore x Stroke	86.4 x 63.9 mm
Capacity	1498 cc
Carburation	Weber 34 mm twin choke downdraught
Compression Ratio	9.2 to 1
Fuel Pump	Mechanical
Valve Gear	SOHC
Claimed Power	62.5 kW at 6000 rpm
Claimed Torque	11.8 Nm at 3200 rpm
Maximum Recommended Engine Speed	7000 rpm
Specific Power Output	41.7 kW/litres

#### TRANSMISSION

Type	Five-speed, all-synchrom
Driving Wheels	Rear
Clutch	190 mm single dry plate

#### Gearbox Ratios

Gear	Ratio	km/h-1000 rpm	Max Speed
First	3.583	6.5	45
Second	2.235	11.4	80
Third	1.454	17.1	120
Fourth	1.042	25.0	175
Fifth	0.863	29.5	180
Final-Drive Ratio			4.077

#### SUSPENSION

Front	Independent with lower control arms and MacPherson struts
Rear	Independent with lower control arms and MacPherson struts
Wheels	5JJ13
Tyres	165SR13

#### BRAKES

Front	227 mm discs
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Rear	227 mm discs
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#### STEERING

Type	Rack and pinion
Turns, Lock to Lock	3.0
Turning Circle	9.6 metres

#### DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHT

Wheelbase	2202 mm
Front Track	1355 mm
Rear Track	1350 mm
Overall Length	3969 mm
Overall Width	1570 mm
Overall Height	1180 mm
Ground Clearance	125 mm
Kerb Weight	920 kg
Weight to Power	14.7 kg/kW

#### CAPACITIES AND EQUIPMENT

Fuel Tank	49 litres
Cooling System	11.6 litres
Engine Sump	4.5 litres
Battery	12 V 45 AH
Alternator	54 Watts

#### FUEL CONSUMPTION

Average for Test	7.74 litres/100 km
Best Recorded	7.05 litres/100 km

#### ACCELERATION

0-60 km/h	5.47 seconds
0-80 km/h	8.80 seconds
0-100 km/h	12.50 seconds
0-110 km/h	15.61 seconds
Standing 400 metres	17.99 seconds

#### THE FIVE-STAR TEST

Finish	★★★★
Comfort	★★★★
Handling	★★★★★
Brakes	★★★★★
Performance	★★★★★
Quietness	★★
Luggage Capacity	★★
Value for money	★★★★

#### CHECKLIST

Alloy Wheels	Yes
Adjustable Steering	No
Air-conditioning	Free
Carpets	Yes
Central door locking	No
Clock	Yes
Intermittent Wipers	Yes
Laminated Screen	Yes
Petrol-filler lock	No
Power Steering	Who needs it
Power Windows	No
Radio	Yes
Tape Player	Yes
Rear-window Wiper	No
Remote outside mirror adjustment	Yes
Sun Roof	The best
Tachometer	Yes

#### COMPARISONS

CAR	CAPACITY (cc)	POWER (kW)	ACCELERATION Standing 400m (Seconds)	FUEL (L/100 kms)	PRICES \$
Fiat X1/9	1498	62	17.9	7.74	13,850
Mazda RX7	2292	77	17.4	13.1	16,380
Triumph TR7	1998	69	18.1	14.4	11,495
Datsun 280ZX	2753	98	17.1	17.4	18,800