

MOTOR MANUAL

OCTOBER 75c

BMW 635

Road Tests

FIAT X1/9

MAZDA 929L



THE \$15,000 GAP
TRANS-AM VS. GTS

Phil Irving
on Turbos

TURBO 924

On the way from Deutschland is a turbocharged version of Porsche's water-cooled front engine/rear-drive two-litre, the 924. The blown Audi-based motor apparently puts out around 110 kW giving the well streamlined coupe a top speed of around 200 km/h. Hans Upp tells me, it could be August (1978) when the model hits production. Himmel!

MAD MAHARAJAH!

There is no shortage of motor museums all over the world these days (Ralph Harrah, the American ex-racing driver and owner of one of the world's most fantastic motor museums, unfortunately died in July), but certainly one of the most interesting of the smaller ones in Bill Meredith-Owens' at Stratford-upon-Avon, deep in Shakespeare Country. Bill has a fine collection of old Rolls, Hispano-Suizas, SS Jaguars, bullnose Morris-Cowleys etc., as well as a splendid array of vintage and veteran impedimenta like hand petrol pumps, those lovely enamelled steel-plate oil advertisements and so on, but the main reason for this unbelievably long introduction is to tell you about one of his Hispano Suizas.

In 1960, Bill journeyed to India to seek stock, for in those days, there were still an amazing amount of beautiful cars hanging about from the days of the Raj. The eye-catching two-seater with dickey that is on display at Stratford (complete with stuffed lion and an equally-stuffed Fortesque-Smythe in topee and shorts!) was one of six once owned by an eccentric Maharajah. There's another kind?!

Seems the Mad Maharajah bought six Hissos, one of them as a wedding present for his son, in 1929, and of course, the two-seater was kitted-out with two huge spotlights and a special, separate 24-volt generator for panther hunting. Absolutely spiffing, what?

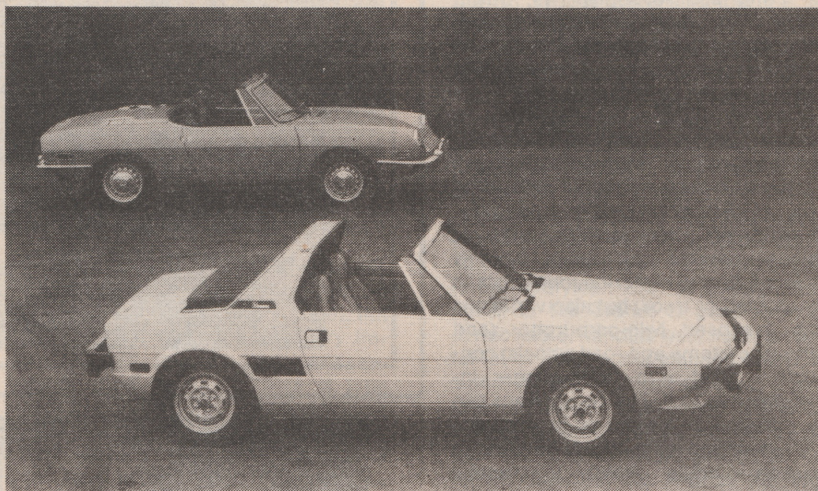
Anyway, it seems one morning, the Maharajah woke with a new and tremendous Hispano Hatred, and ordered his men to drive them over a nearby cliff — including his son's wedding present. A bit off Blenkinsop, what? The Maharajah was obviously a man of heart, for according to the vendor, "he let the drivers get out first, sir".

It seems the panther-hunting Hispano refused to start, so it didn't go over the cliff, and journeyed to England and the Stratford Motor Museum. Drop in and view it, should you be visiting Ann Hathaway's Cottage.

100,000 X1/9s

Bertone is well-pleased with his Fiat X1/9 production which is now more than 100,000. It isn't the Grugliasco's biggest-ever figure though, for Bertone's work turned out more than 140,000 of those jolly little rear-engined

Fiat 850 Spiders a few years ago. It is thought that the X1/9 will easily out-do the Spiders in the end though, for the mid-engined, detachable roof sports car has been an enormous sales success, and there are variations to come, of course.



ALFASUD SPIDER?

Freddo Pasta also tells me there is a Spider version of the Alfased coming along, and that it will be available with the 1.3-litre 'flat-four' engine, or the bigger 1.5-litre that was recently introduced to get the cars into the next higher speed limit sector! Italy has about eleven different speed limits these days, applicable to engine capacity etc.

No definite news lately of the 'big' Alfa that has been seen around, on and off for about a year now. But Alfa-Romeo have had their share of labour and political troubles, not to mention big losses.

RUSTICA FIAT

Freddo Pasta, my indefatigable Italian *espionaggio* tells me there is a replacement for the Fiat 126 coming along with a very sharply-styled two-door body by Guigiaro. Apparently, designated "Rustica", it is anything but thatched-roofed, and is powered by two alternative twin-cylinder engines (presumably air-cooled) of 600 and 900 cm³. The little rear-engined 126 has been with us since 1972, and was, of course, derived from the old '500', so maybe the new-wave car has gone front-drive. Freddo says, as he understands it, the Rustica will be amongst us next year.

LIMITED LADA

There's no doubt about it, Russia is really getting into the motor business. In the UK, the British importers, Satra Motors, have celebrated their 40,000th Lada sale by introducing a special 1200 which has just about every bit of *luxe* equipment as standard (items like front reclining seats, laminated windscreen, head restraints, Goodyear radial tyres, pile carpets, heated rear window, pushbutton Radiomobile, vinyl roof, body coachline, and what else), and all for the equivalent of about \$3220. The price also includes seat belts, delivery, number plates, and a full year's road tax. Only 300 of the special edition Lada 1200s will be made.

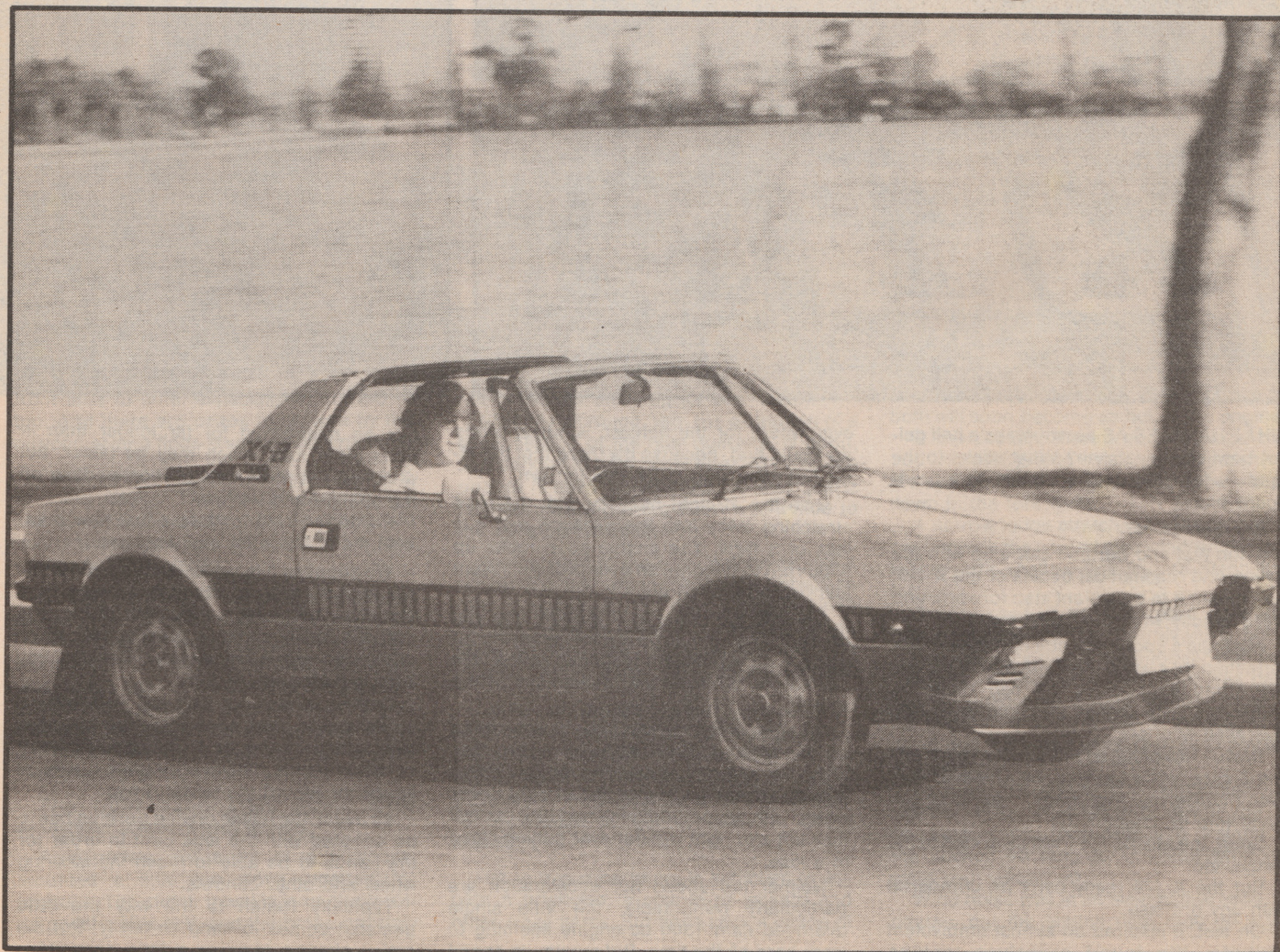
Before the end of the year, the 4WD Niva 2121 will also be imported into the UK, in lhd form, at a price around \$6600. The Niva uses a 1600 cm³ version of the familiar Russian-designed ohc motor, so now there are 1200, 1300, 1500 and 1600 versions of the motor — two basic blocks, and two basic crankshafts. I was told by Satra brass that the engine can't be stretched any more, and later, Olga Balalaika, my spy from the Steppes, told me she thinks there will be a Lada 1600 saloon ere long. Not to mention an estate.

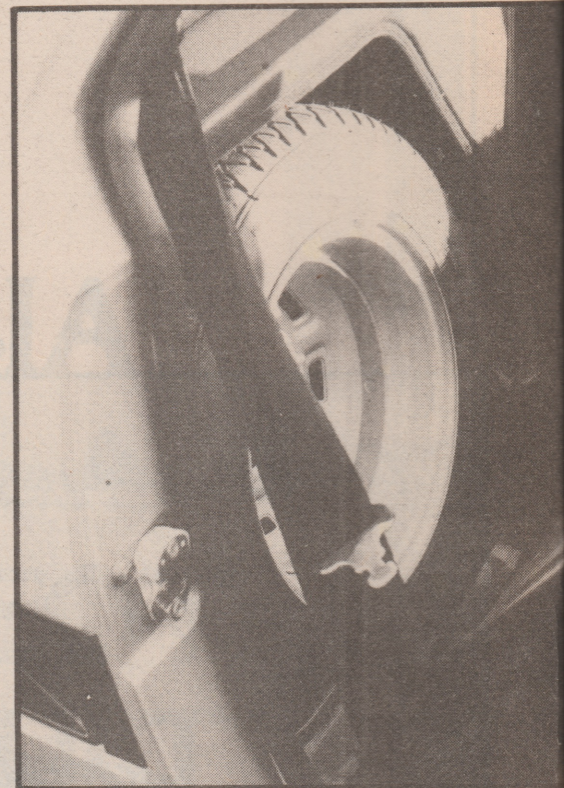
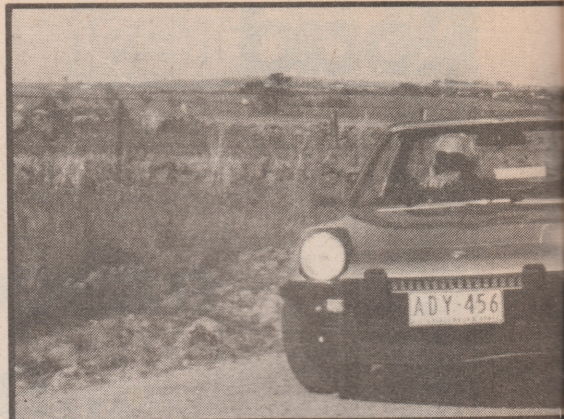
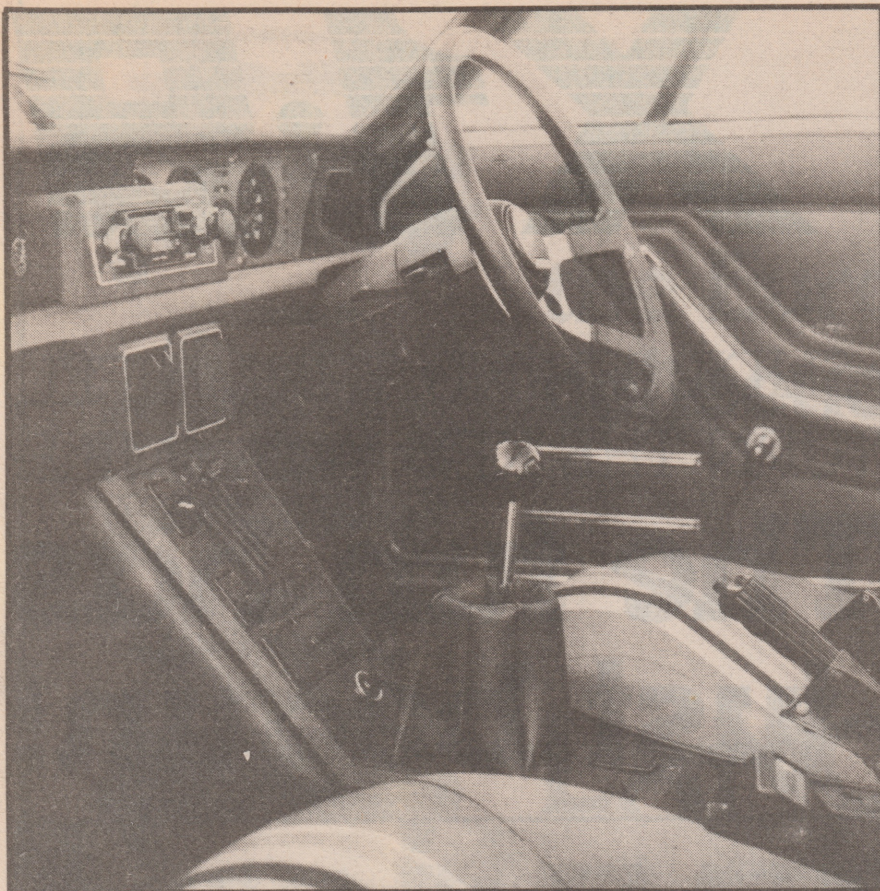
So I won't.

X1.9

SLIDE BEHIND THE WHEEL,
TURN THE KEY AND SMILE;

**The fun has
just begun!**





WHAT HANDLES AS nervously as a half gelled bowl of minestrone? What sticks to the road surface like cold spaghetti to a cardboard plate?

OK. Game over.

When Fiat and Bertone came up with the styling and mechanical details of the X 1/9, they meant it to be a giant step forward, and that's exactly what they achieved.

Australia's sports car cult is on the move, refreshed by a whole new line of models that the string back glove set can relate to, rather than the grease streaked dark blue overalled Mini set.

Datsun has plugged this line for years with the Z cars, while Leyland, or whatever they call themselves this week, has bounced back with its Triumph TR 7.

Soon, the Mazda RX 7 will be added to the range, too.

But the X 1/9 really can't be compared with any of these.

On test, it inspired an almost ambivalent attitude. We found ourselves looking

everywhere for the tightest, windiest roads we could find, because it's there that the little Fiat comes so much into its own.

Give it a straight highway with the road stretching away into the distance and it is less of a thrill. The engine soon racks up 6500 rpm to become an ever present irritant just behind the left ear.

Get into the twisty stuff though, and you cease caring about the engine, enjoying instead a superb instant response as the little car reacts to every tiny movement of the wheel.

Nervous is the correct way of describing its handling. A short wheelbase, together with rack and pinion steering, endow it with a huge advantage in a series of tight esses when, with speed undiminished, the car will flick left and right without ever getting close to a lose.

Neither top speed nor acceleration are particularly remarkable, the little single overhead cam 1300 cc engine seeming to work hard all the time. But maximum speed

can be maintained for far longer than in most other cars which may be faster, but which take a great deal of manhandling off the straight and narrow.

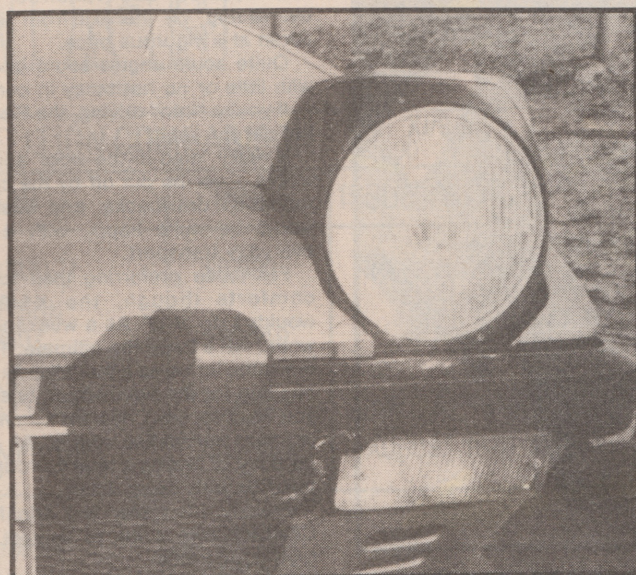
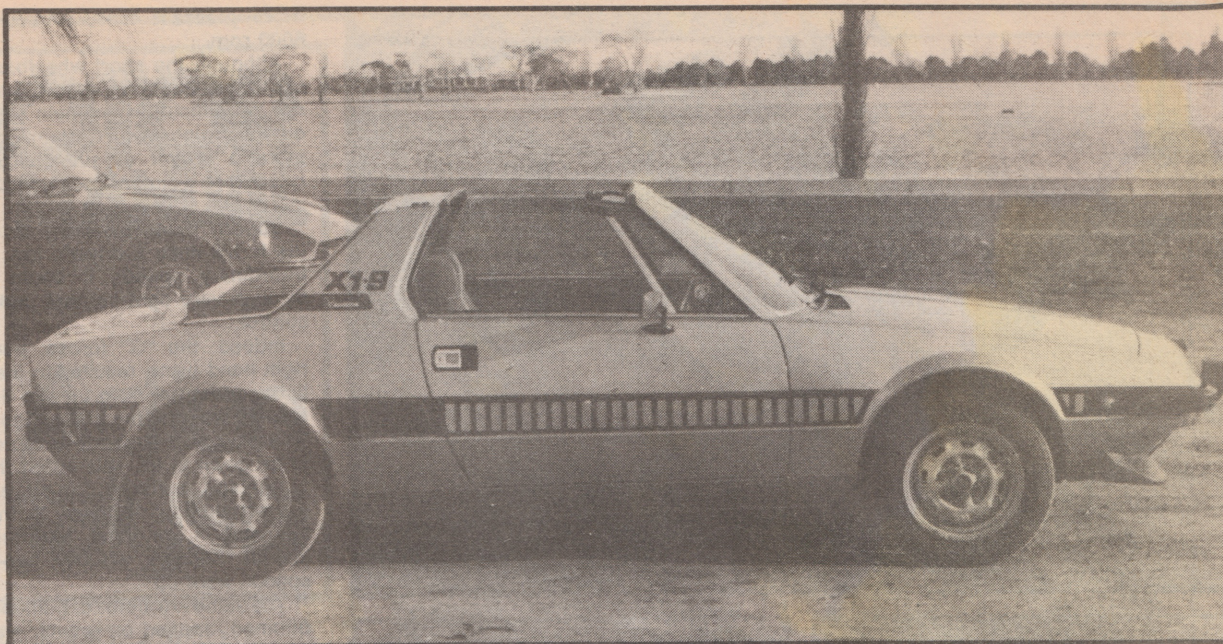
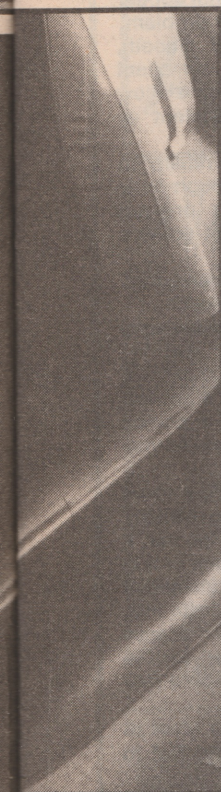
It's rather hard to assess just how practical the X 1/9 is for everyday use.

We suppose it leans towards the motorcycle in that respect, although security from the elements, plus a modicum of luggage carrying ability enhance practicability when compared with a two wheeler. Besides, you can't fall off a Fiat X 1/9!

Getting in and out isn't the easiest as it really is very close to the ground. It's more like putting the car on than actually getting in. Once inside, however, there's plenty of space for all but the tallest driver.

As usual, the Italian driving position has to be adopted with the legs bent in order for the hands to be able to reach the steering wheel and other controls.

Typically Italian is the way the little gearshift comes to hand so easily. But the actual change requires a little persuasion



from time to time, especially from third to top. And there are prizes to be won by the newcomer who finds reverse gear first time!

Once correctly seated, everything comes to hand easily. The heater controls are positioned in the centre console, along with instrument panel light controls and a rear screen heater demister.

On the test car, we had a pleasant radio/stereo cassette player on board, too.

Other controls are mounted on the steering column. The main light switch is on the fascia to the right of the column, but the control for side lights, and high/low beam are on a stalk to the left. In front of that is the direction indicator control, and it's easy to confuse the two at first.

The right hand stalk looks after windshield washers and wipers.

Foot pedals are a bit of a nuisance, mounted a little too close together for brogues. The clutch travel is long, the throttle pedal a little stiff, and the brake possibly

needs regular bleeding for best effect.

Visibility all round, with the exception of a small section of the rear quarters, is good, and parking in tight spots easy. At night, the pop up headlights do a fine job with quartz halogen power making them well suited to the car's performance.

For the wind in the hair enthusiast, it's a matter of a moment to release the fibreglass "lid" over the driving compartment. Once off, this takes its place in the front luggage area — once the hood release latch is located hidden away under the dashboard!

At the rear there's another luggage compartment for small items, this being behind the engine. Release catches, both for the engine lid and the rear luggage compartment are in the passenger side door "lintel" — impossible to get at with the doors locked.

The rear compartment is sufficient to accept a briefcase, a couple of jackets and other small items. But don't stick a gallon of

ice cream or a dozen "aristotles" in there as both will soon become as hot as the engine!

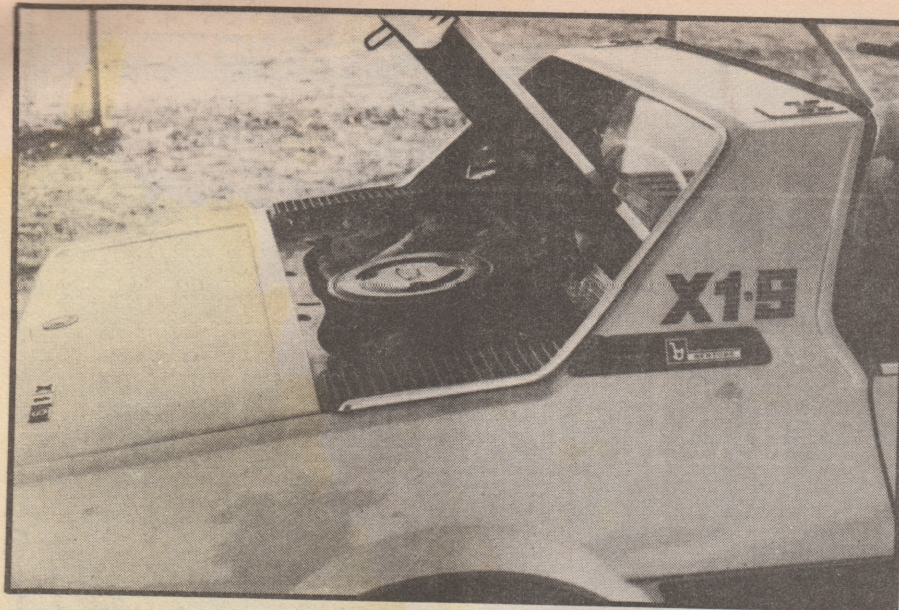
In the cockpit, there's no glove box, but odd bits and pieces can be stowed behind the seat backrests or in small cubbies deep down in the foot wells.

A narrow ledge stretches the width of the car beneath the heated rear window. Similar ledges with shallow lips feature along the fascia.

On the road, it soon became apparent how well placed all the controls were, but a small drawback that is the bugbear with any "convertible" was wind roar. This was particularly noticeable around the rear seals of the cockpit lid and the rear of the side windows. But this was a small penalty to pay for convertibility.

During a few days of unseasonably sunny weather, it was possible to drive with the lid off. Surprisingly, there was little draught in the cockpit so long as the side windows were kept wound up.

Wind noise was at an even higher level, of course, but the engine note took on a far



more pleasant tone, particularly around 6000 rpm.

Although the short wheelbase made the car responsive to direction changes, it was not too difficult to maintain a straight track on long highways. Certainly, control was more a matter of subconscious thought rather than a studied movement of the steering wheel.

Superb manoeuvrability is what makes the X 1/9 such a driver's joy. At quite extraordinary speeds it could be hustled through very tight corners under complete control.

Indeed, the "G" forces, particularly on right hand turns, resulted in the oil warning light coming on from time to time. For this reason, we took the precaution of adding a little oil, even though the level did not appear to be down at all. This cured the problem.

Unmade surfaces, rough and smooth, were soaked up very well by the compliant suspension, minimal harshness at low speeds became virtually non-existent as speeds went up.

The same attributes of manoeuvrability on bitumen, applied on gravel, although fairly fine balance was required to prevent oversliding, on the exit from tight corners taken at a vigorous pace.

Quite acute angles could be maintained with little or no hesitancy in correction.

If you're "into" driving, the Fiat is certainly the car for you!

A really "died-in-the-wool" sports car buff would never be put off by the car's accommodation drawbacks, and such a person would be quite happy with it as normal everyday transport.

For those preferring their lounge room comforts though, the X1/9 probably wouldn't do at all. As a weekend fun car, it would have to be the ultimate. Think of it in the same terms as a trail bike. But instead of heading for the uninhabited bush, with this, you head for your nearest mountain passes or other serpentine routes. All just for the pure joy of feeling a total thoroughbred respond to your every whim.

Frankly, it's rather like drinking Moët et Chandon with coke, to subject the Fiat to rush hour traffic!

Datsun produced a brutish sort of machine when it introduced their 'Z' cars. Totally masculine in concept, the "26 ounce" is, however, starting to become dated in the way it does things and in the styling stakes.

Triumph's TR 7 is more feminine, possessing really up-to-the-minute styling, a boulevard ride but not terribly exciting acceleration and top speed.

The Fiat has unique styling and the sort of handling that a Formula Ford racing car would be happy with. It will appeal equally to male and female, and with an engine of 1600cc, would become today's ultimate.

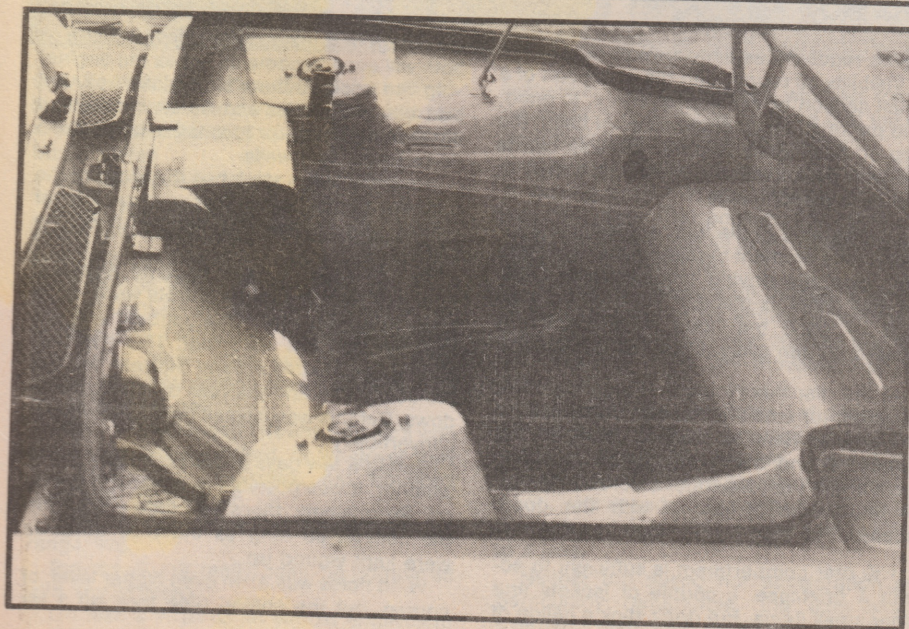
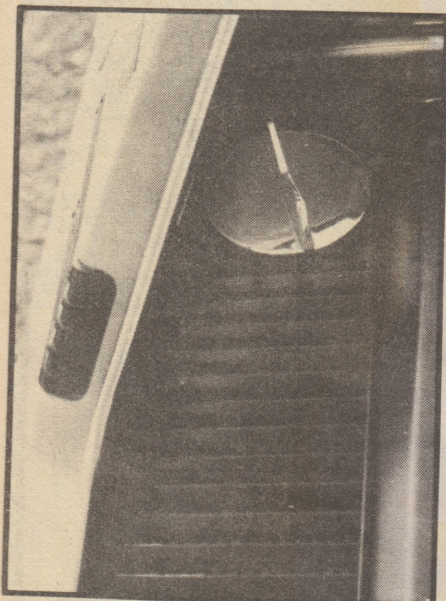
Motor Manual extends its sincere congratulations to Signor Bertone for packing so much into so little, so well! □

Top of page: Engine access is very limited . . .

Centre left: Fuel filler is out of the way, but still easy to get to.

Centre right: These two lockable levers release the engine lid (left lever) and boot lid (right).

Left: Only soft bags need apply . . .

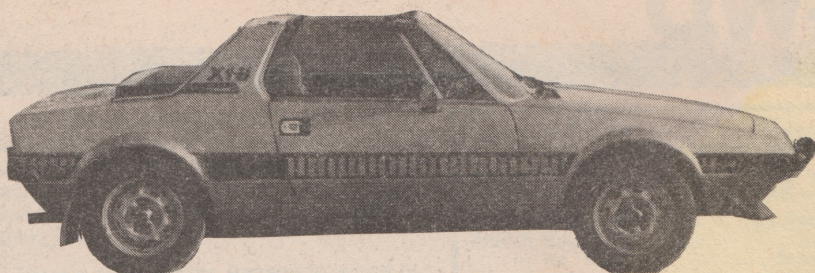


MOTOR MANUAL



Action Analysis

FIAT X-19



COMPETITION COMPARISON

FIAT X1/9
\$9,690

CAR	PRICE	ISSUE TESTED
ALFASUD TI	\$6,990	APRIL 1975
DATSUN 260Z	\$10,119	—
LANCIA BETA COUPE	\$11,283	JANUARY 1978
TRIUMPH TR7	\$10,495	AUGUST 1978

STAR RATING (OUT OF FIVE)

ENGINE:	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆
GEARBOX:	☆ ☆ ☆
BRAKES:	☆ ☆ ☆
STEERING:	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆
RIDE:	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆
ROAD HOLDING:	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆
FEATURES:	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆
PERFORMANCE:	☆ ☆ ☆
FINISH:	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆
OVERALL:	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

MANUFACTURER Fiat SpA Turin
MODEL Fiat X1/9
BODY TYPE Two seat two door coupe
TEST CAR FROM Spencer Motors P/L
S. Melbourne

PRICE — basic \$9690
as tested \$10,060

OPTIONS FITTED (and cost)
AM/FM Radio Stereo Cassette \$370

ENGINE:
Location Central-Transverse mounted
Construction Iron Block Alloy Head
No. of Cylinders Four
Configuration In line
Capacity 1290cc
Valve Gear Single Overhead Camshaft
Induction System Twin Choke Weber
Compression Ratio 9.2:1
Bore and Stroke (mm) 86 x 55.5
Power output at 6000 rpm (Kw/bhp) 53.7/73
Torque at 3400 rpm (Nm/lbs ft) 101/74

TRANSMISSION:
Type Four Speed Manual
Shift Location Centre console
Drive Rear
Ratios:
1st 1.358
2nd 2.235

3rd 1.454
4th 0.959
Final drive 4.077

BODY/CHASSIS:
Construction Unitary
Panel material Steel
Weight (kg) 880
Dimensions (mm):
Length 3830
Width 1570
Height 1170
Wheelbase 2202
Front track 1335
Rear track 1343

SUSPENSION:
Front Independent McPherson strut
Rear Independent Transverse swinging
arms strut type, Pillar shock absorbers
and coil spring units.

BRAKES:
Type Hydraulic dual circuit
Front Disc
Rear Disc

STEERING:
Type Rack and pinion
Turning circle 10m

WHEELS/TYRES:
Wheel type Ventilated steel disc
Diameter 13"

Rim width 4.5"
Tyre make Michelin
Type XAS
Dimensions 145-13

PERFORMANCE:

Speedometer error (km/h):
Indicated 60 80 100
Actual 62 81 98
Acceleration from standstill to:
60 km/h 5.7
80 km/h 9.1
100 km/h 12.8
120 km/h 18.2
140 km/h 27.8
Acceleration from 60 to 100 km/h 7
Standing start 400 metres:
Elapsed time 18.9
Terminal speed 119 km/h
Maximum speeds in gears:
1st 40 km/h @ 6700 rpm
2nd 70 km/h @ 6700 rpm
3rd 110 km/h @ 6700 rpm
4th 160 km/h @ 6700 rpm
Braking — 110 km/h to zero:
(average distance taken
in metres) 52m
Fuel consumption on test:
(litres per 100 km/mpg) 9.3/31.3
Tank capacity 48 litres

*Performance figures recorded using SILICONIX ET 100 digital stop watches from Smiths Industries
P/L, Technical Sales Division, 132 Bank Street, Melb. 3205.