

2010 Fiat 500

There's wide speculation that the Fiat 500 will be sold in the United States beginning sometime in 2011. A city car built by the Italian automaker, the diminutive Fiat 500 is designed to be fun and frugal. Think of it as a competitor to the Mini Cooper and the Honda Fit, though it's expected to be less expensive.

With its retro styling and sporty options, the Fiat 500 will likely be positioned as a premium subcompact. It's expected to be sold at Chrysler dealerships.

The Fiat 500 may be available in several body styles: two-door coupe, two-door convertible, four-door sedan, and a high-performance Abarth version. The front-wheel-drive hatchback is available with a choice of three engines.

The top-of-the-line 1.4-liter four-cylinder engine is the most likely choice for the U.S. market. The 16-valve engine is rated at 99 horsepower and is expected to get about 34 miles per gallon in the city, 45 mpg on the highway. The Abarth version is turbocharged and is rated at 133 horsepower, allowing it to accelerate from 0-60 mph in less than 7.9 seconds.

The current version was launched in July 2007. Its retro styling was aimed at capturing the success enjoyed by the Mini Cooper and the Volkswagen Beetle. Much of its design came from Frank Stephenson who was involved in the design of the Mini Cooper.

Critics love its styling, calling it adorable and irresistible. Inside, it gets equally high praise for its attractive design, high-quality materials and ease of use.

The two-door coupe is expected first, followed by the convertible, both sometime in 2011. The high-performance Abarth model is expected in 2012. The four-door version is expected in 2013.

Much of this is speculation, of course, but several top officials at Fiat have said it will happen and Fiat CEO Sergio Marchionne announced his intention to sell a U.S. version of the Fiat 500 in the U.S. before the end of 2010.

Chrysler was merged with Fiat in January 2009 after President Barrack Obama forced Chrysler into bankruptcy to encourage the merger. The Fiat 500 is expected to be built at a Chrysler factory in Toluca, Mexico. Part of the merger deal was that Fiat would cover the cost of retooling a Chrysler plant to produce a Fiat model to be sold in the U.S. and would provide engine and transmission technology to help Chrysler introduce fuel-efficient small cars.

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