



FUN in a FLAT

An enjoyable road test-tour in Cuba with a Fiat 1100 TV convertible

story and photos by Joe Wherry

NOW THAT FIAT is at long last getting set to make an all-out assault on (or in) the imported car market in these United States, it seems fitting to determine just how good one of their top models is, what it can do performance-wise, and whether it can succeed against well entrenched competition.

It's rarely that we have the opportunity to test a car slated for, but not yet available on, the domestic market. However, enthusiasm for Fiat machinery has always been quite high in this country. So, when the writer met Sr. Luis Galbis Martinez and Sr. Manuel Rodriguez San Pedro during the recent Grand Prix of Havana, and when he learned that these two gentlemen of Galmar Motors Co. S.A. were the Distributors Nacionale for Fiat in Cuba and was offered a new Fiat 1100 TV, he leaped at the chance.

Frankly, I wanted to see some of the Cuban hinterlands; to do so from the cockpit of the tiny 1100 TV *Trasformabile 2 posti* (two-seater convertible) was better yet. My companion for about 140 kilometers was Chris Economaki, the well known editor of the tabloid, *National Speed Sport News*. Together we traversed the Route Nacionale southwest of Havana into Pinar Del Rio Province. The two-lane blacktop road was full of curves, sharp ones, and featured many unexpected obstacles to high average speeds—there were frequent domestic animals and even more frequent carts drawn by oxen, horses and the like.

Gasoline of suitable grade (benzin) costs from 33 to 37 cents per gallon; a coke is usually 10 centavos, a good steak dinner with all the trimmings can be had in the provincial inns with good service for \$1.50 up. In the large cities the latter tallies with domestic prices.

In the big cities and small country towns and villages most

streets are narrow; there are few stop signs or other traffic control mechanisms except at major intersections. One soon becomes accustomed to driving with the horn; approaching a blind corner, the one who beeps first is considered to have the right-of-way.

Cubans are not insane drivers, but they do drive with spirit. Strangely they seem to prefer their own side of the road. I found it quite enjoyable. You'll also find the Cubans extremely polite and considerate. If an approaching car blinks its lights, you're being warned of danger ahead, which may be anything from animals or children in the road to a motorcycle policeman with a pad and pencil.

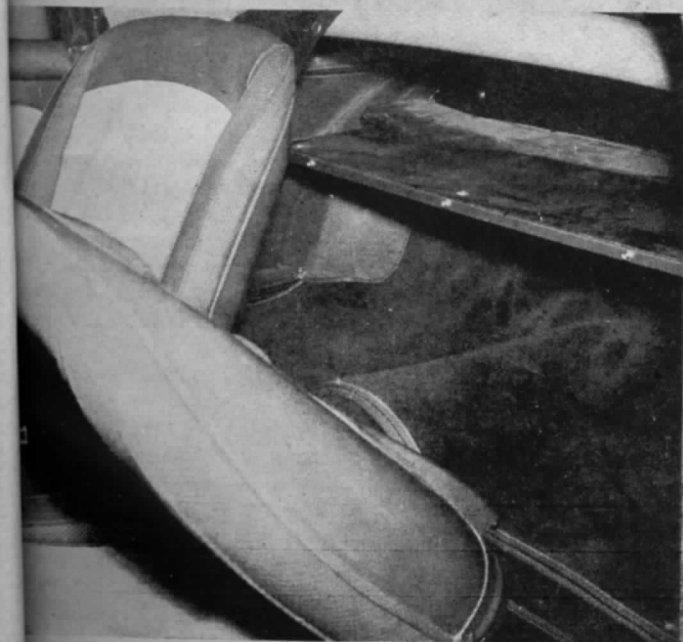
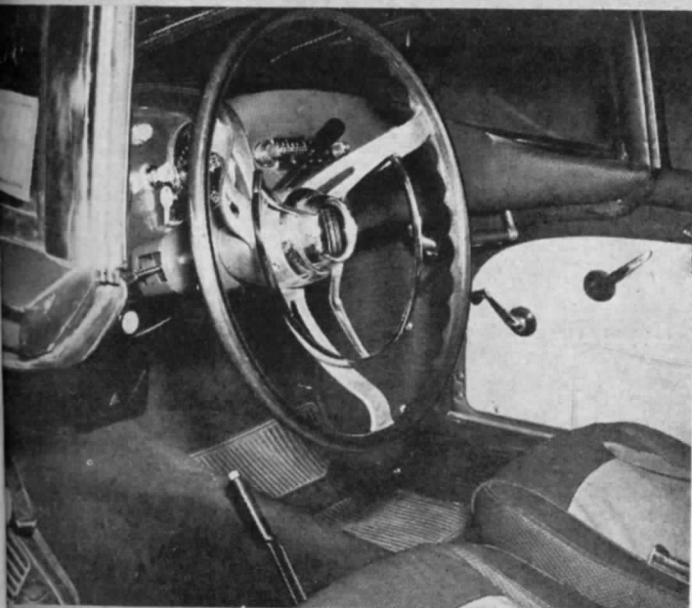
But, back to the Fiat TV. This is an extremely well-built car. Since the Cuban delivered price of \$3100 includes an import duty of at least 20 per cent, it would appear that judicious marketing at USA Ports of Entry could make the TV available to the consumer, on the coasts, for around \$2750 with the full complement of equipment including whitewall tires, chrome wheel discs, a sharp pushbutton radio, turn signals, seat belt for the single passenger, padded dash, folding top, and upholstery that looks as much like leather as if it were.

Our captions tell the details of this intriguing little two-seater, the specs have the information not covered due to space restrictions, and my notebook tells me that I'd like to do more driving in Cuba. If you feel the same way you might like to know that rental cars are available everywhere in the island republic for \$25 per week plus mileage (Couture, Avis, Hertz, etc.). Or, you can take your own family rig aboard the TMT Auto Ferry at Key West for \$62 round trip to Havana; for you

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FIAT 1100 TV ENGINE, with its familiar Weber carburetor and ohv layout, is easily accessible, although the standard windshield washer, fresh air intake ducting, oil filter, etc. seem to crowd compartment. A well padded dash displays large side-by-side instrument dials with warning lights for low oil pressure and battery discharge. Passenger seat has grab handle under dash and safety belt. Legroom is unusually ample for a small import. Though basically of 1956 vintage, the Fiat 1100 TV is new to most Americans. Beautifully wrought coachwork by Carrozzeria Vettura and well appointed details should please discriminating tastes.



PACKAGE SHELF behind seats is easily reached and could probably be removed for installation of occasional seat for youngsters. Upholstery is plastic, neatly and strongly stitched in lively two-tone, with matching door panels. Carpeting is of thick woolen pile. Cockpit is weather-tight, with heater as optional equipment. Luggage space approximates that of Triumph TR-3; it contains spare tire and battery, which is covered to prevent possible damage to deposited items. Roadability of little TV is excellent. On test-tour it handled smoothly, and powered through sharp curves with pleasurable ease and comfort.

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and your car's passengers the round trip rate is an equally modest 10 bucks.

For touring Cuba I would suggest a car with something akin to the TV's fantastic ability to stay put in extreme situations, a similar good-sized trunk which can be locked, sun glasses, and a few extra *viente centavo* pieces plus a good camera, for when you stop a youngster, a village post-man or a farmer type with a load of sugar cane all over his pony, it doesn't hurt to toss him a coin for his trouble. The Americano, though amazingly well liked, can be as much rural trouble to the citizens as he is to the bellhop in his hotel.

Where else can you have such a ball without a visa?



CUBAN BYWAYS proved the Fiat's ease of handling, revealed native color.

PERFORMANCE

ACCELERATION

From Standing Start
0-45 mph 14.4 0-60 mph 31.0
Passing Speeds
30-50 mph 11.2 45-60 mph 16.6

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Stop-and-Go Driving
29 mpg tank average for 200 miles

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE: Ohv 4. Bore 2.68 in. Stroke 2.95 in. Stroke/bore ratio 1.1:1. Compression ratio 7.6:1. Displacement 66.4 cu. in. Advertised bhp 50 @ 5400 rpm. Bhp per cu. in. 0.75. Piston travel @ max. bhp 2655 ft. per min.

TRANSMISSION: Standard transmission is four-speed synchromesh with helical gears.

SUSPENSION: Front, coil springs and A-arms; Rear, semi-elliptics.

STEERING: Turning diameter 34.5 ft. Turns lock to lock 2½. Type: mechanical.

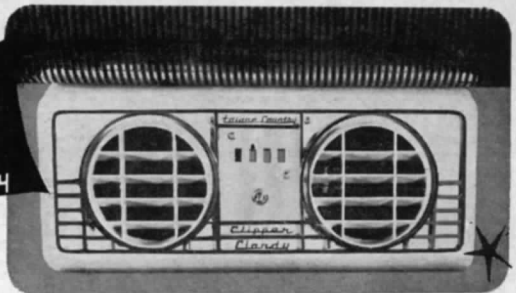
WEIGHT: Test car with gas, oil and water, 1890 lbs. Test car weight/bhp ratio 37.8:1.

DIMENSIONS: Wheelbase 92 in., overall height 58.3 in., overall width 60.1 in., front tread 48 in., ground clearance, 6.5 in.

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