



Fiat Stilo

Featured model: 5-door 1.6 Dynamic



AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	☆☆☆☆○
Handling/steering	☆☆☆☆○
Comfort	☆☆☆☆○
Space/practicality	☆☆☆☆○

THE STILO RANGE

size and type 3- and 5-door lower-medium (mid-priced) hatchback
trim levels Active, Dynamic, Abarth
engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.2 litre/80bhp, 4/1.6/103, 4/1.8/133, 5/2.4/170; diesel: 4/1.9/115
drive front-wheel drive, 1.2 : 6-speed manual, 1.6/1.8 : 5-speed manual, 2.4 Abarth : 5-speed Selespeed sequential automatic
notable features (according to model) sliding/reclining back seats, xenon/see-you-home headlamps, electric power steering, Connect infotelematic system, cooled glovebox, curtain airbags, parking/rain/dusk sensors. Options: integrated child seats, rear side airbags, radar cruise control

VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

length x width (exc mirrors)	425x178
front - legroom	88-106
- headroom (no sunroof)	94-98
rear - typical legroom	101
- typical kneeroom	70
- headroom	95
- hiproom	132
load space with all seats in use (litres/cu ft)	
(back seat forward)	490/17.3
(back seat rearward)	405/14.3
load length (seats up/folded)	73/138
load width	101
load sill height (inside/outside)	21/69
boot/load aperture height	55/86

SO, IT'S *ARRIVIDERCI* TO THE Brava/Bravo duo that never exactly had punters beating a path to Fiat showrooms. But the Italian giant is predicting that the outgoing models' replacement, Stilo, is going to change all that.

The newcomer is, in fact, two different cars in terms of style, personality and size: the sleeker three-door is more of a sporting driver's car, while the longer, taller five-door is the practical, family-friendly model.

Fiat admits that Stilo doesn't boast the most technically advanced chassis, but concentrates rather on high-tech equipment, together with interior versatility and upmarket trim. Even the entry-level Active models are well equipped, particularly with safety features (including window airbags), while the flagship Abarth runs the gamut of goodies from an air quality sensor to xenon headlamps. Top feature in the toy department is Fiat's Connect infotelematic system. It's a sort of electronic Jeeves, based at a call centre near Milan, that will cater for your every (motoring) need.

From the wide range of models, we concentrated on the optimistically named 1.6-litre Dynamic, whose 103bhp engine gives pretty much par-for-the-course performance that's aided by an excellent gearchange. The twin-cam 16-valver is a smooth revver, but only begins to feel really perky from about 3500rpm, at which point it develops a muted sporty growl. Motorway cruising is relaxed, however, with low wind and tyre noise.

Thanks to supple suspension, the Stilo runs rivals like the Focus close on ride

comfort. Nevertheless, it lacks the Ford's deft steering and cornering touch, with electric power steering that's short on feel – though not as vague as some. A "City" button makes it finger-twirlingly light for easy parking – especially useful for disabled people.

Plenty of seat and steering wheel adjustments result in an easily tailored driving position. The cushion tilt isn't ideal, though, and there's no footroom alongside the clutch. Although the soft-feel facia and especially the centre stack are busy with buttons, they're all in easy reach.

The Stilo isn't quite the longest model in its class but, at 153cm, it's taller than its rivals, so headroom all round is particularly good. So is footspace, but kneeroom isn't over-generous. Sensibly, the 60/40 divided, fold-flat seats recline up to 30 degrees on the five-door model, and also slide fore and aft by 8cm. This means comfortable accommodation for passengers or extra length to the deep and roomy boot – pity about the high rear sill, though.

VERDICT

The Stilo won't give the opposition sleepless nights as far as performance and deportment are concerned, but three cheers for its soundly engineered feel and high quality cabin. Fiat has been far from stinting with the equipment and safety features, too. We were actually expecting rather more in the way of passenger space, but that sliding back seat could prove useful. Quite the best family Fiat for years.

LIKES ...

push-down-flush rear head restraints
lots of storage spaces
cooled glovebox
rear side airbags available

and GRIPES

low-mounted heater controls
space-saver spare wheel
no tread plates to protect sills
hint of orange-peel paint finish