

CLASSIC DRIVER

Riding the rally scorpion in the Fiat Cinquecento Trofeo

Lead

In the early 1990s, Fiat launched a rally version of its popular Cinquecento microcar to compete in its own European single-make cup series. Now the tiny lightweight track and rally weapon could make a return as the next big thing among collectors...



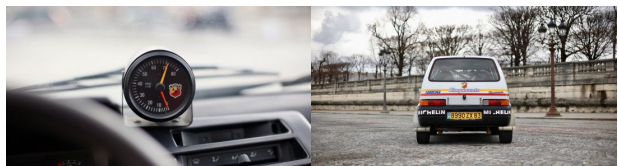
When the Fiat Cinquecento was introduced in 1991, the world expected a cheap and versatile city car for grocery shopping, in the spirit of the original Fiat 500. But adolescent Italians soon learned that their mothers' new, lightweight and surprisingly agile Cinquecentos were also perfect toys for street racing on cobblestone boulevards, cutting corners in dense renaissance-era city centres and drifting around tight mountain curves. It's not clear whether Fiat simply wanted to get Italy's speed-mad youth off the roads or aimed to create a more inclusive and affordable way of entering the increasingly expensive world of motorsport, but in 1992, the Fiat Cinquecento Trofeo was born.



The microcar now had its own single-make racing series. But the Cinquecento was far from a proper rally car. The tiny 899cc four-pot engine generated a scant 38HP, which might have been enough for a run to the *supermercato*, but hardly sufficed while going for gold on a racetrack or rally course. Fiat's engineers therefore decided to turn the giant go-kart into a proper circuit weapon. Thanks to improved cooling and a beefier exhaust, 55HP was coaxed from the engine and the gearbox received an enforced clutch. Equipped with a Sparco steering wheel, bucket seats and a roll cage and sitting on Bilstein suspension, Abarth wheels and sticky Michelin tyres, the 790kg Cinquecento was finally ready to race.



Both the car and the series in which it was intended to compete were tailored for young, hot-shoed drivers, with dedicated classes for beginners, under-21s and women. At the first race in 1993, some 70 participants battled it out over two days on the fast and demanding Mugello circuit. The Trofeo wasn't limited to Italy, however – drivers in France, Germany and Poland also competed in seven to nine qualification races per season. At the end of the year, the best pilots from each country came together for a three-day showdown, vying for the jackpot prize: an entry ticket to the Monte-Carlo Rally behind the wheel of a Works-entered Cinquecento.



Soon, more countries such as Denmark, Greece and Spain held their own qualification races, creating a European championship for aspiring pilots and hundreds of young amateurs taking their first steps onto the rally stage. Although the Cinquecento Trofeo was built to be raced in Fiat's single-make series, this didn't stop owners entering their cars in other competitions. The Trofeos even appeared at rounds of the World Rally Championship. In 1995, the launch of the Fiat Cinquecento Sporting gave way to a more powerful incarnation of the Trofeo, with a power increase to 105HP on the Group A version developed for the grand finale in Monte-Carlo. The Trofeo championship continued until 1997, when the reveal of the Fiat Seicento heralded a new chapter for the Turin brand.



While most people might have forgotten about this small and modest footnote in motorsport's long history, some of the cars have endured to this day in the hands of collectors. This particular Fiat Cinquecento Trofeo was built in 1993 and campaigned by Fiat Auto France. Since then, it's been kept in excellent condition, with its period homologation stickers, passports and grey registration card. Just 9,545km show on the clock. The car is [currently offered for sale on Classic Driver by Straderial Motorcars in Paris](#). And while ex-Works Fiat racing cars from the 1970s and '80s are already very desirable and increasingly valuable, we strongly believe that the 1990s Fiat Cinquecentos and their affordable rally-bred incarnations will soon climb the wish lists of discerning collectors around the world.

Photos: Straderial Motorcars

Gallery

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