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TEST DRIVE

The Logic of Fun

2017 Fiat 124 Spider

DAN LYONS | text and photos
Special to the Times Union

Fiat was reintroduced to the U.S. market in model year 2012. Since then, they've followed a time-honored method to expand their brand. The first wave of vehicles that arrived on our shores were all small. Successive models were progressively larger to suit a broader base of buyers.

The latest lineup addition breaks the pattern, but the move makes market sense.

This new Fiat has an old name — the 124 Spider. Readers with a few miles on their odometers may remember the previous incarnation. Fiat sold more than

2017 Fiat 124 Spider

MSRP: \$24,995 - \$31,335 (Destination charge: \$995)

170,000 of the two-seat sports cars stateside between 1968-1985. Fast forward a little more than 30 years to the revival of the 124 Spider — the subject of this week's test drive.

The 2017 edition is offered in three trim levels: Classica (\$24,995), Lusso (\$27,495) and Abarth (\$28,195), along with one special edition (Prima Edizione, \$35,000).

At the press launch of the 124 Spider, I split my driving time between stick and automatic equipped Classica and Lusso models, along with a brief autocross run in the Abarth.

The new 124 Spider isn't a clean sheet sports car.



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While based on the underpinnings of the current Mazda MX-5, the 2017 Fiat 124 Spider shares none of the Miata's sheet metal, opting instead for its own Italian design and turbocharged Italian engine.

Rather, Fiat has chosen to build on the bones of the latest Mazda Miata. It's hard to argue with the logic. Fiat can put their stamp on the car and bring it to market far quicker (and at less cost) than they could using a start-from-scratch approach. And, they're really good bones.

Compared to the Miata, the 124 Spider is 5 inches longer, a whisker wider (.2 inch) and lower (.1 inch). While dimensionally similar, the cars share no sheet metal. Stylistic nods to Spiders past include the hexagonal grille (original 124 Spider) and the power domes on the hood (second series). Collectively, it's a handsome sports car, with

an Italian design character. The seven color choices are surprising in the preponderance of subdued hues. The special edition is bright blue, but beyond that, red is the only extroverted shade available. I would have bet my *casa* that there would've been at least a yellow tone on the color charts.

The powertrain marries an Italian engine to a Japanese transmission. Fiat's intercooled, turbocharged, 1.4L four-cylinder MultiAir engine is matched with an Aisin six-speed manual transmission. An Aisin six-speed automatic can be added to

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