

BADGE ENGINEERING

A couple of years ago Abarth released a special Ferrari Edition 500 at over £30000 and they are about to do the same thing again, this time using the Maserati name. The Abarth 695 Maserati Edition is actually based on the 500C convertible variant and only 499 (all numbered) will be made, which is probably all that the market will be able to stand at £32000 each!



So what do you get for the (not inconsiderable) extra money? Well, not a huge amount really, apart from fitted leather luggage, some styling differences, various bits of carbon fibre and alloy interior trim, a 'unique' dashboard and deep red Maserati paint. As is so often the case with limited editions, it is not so much that there are many extras, just that some things are different, although an additional 20bhp is present over the normal Esseeesse 695 output.

Quite who these sort of special editions are aimed at is a bit hard to fathom (to say 'those with more money than sense' would perhaps be uncharitable), although having one might be useful for a Maserati owner who wanted to go somewhere with restricted access, or even for Mrs Maserati to do some high-speed shopping. You can still get quite a nice used Maserati for the same price, though.

While these big-name special editions might be designed to give a halo effect to the range, perhaps they simply detract from the normal Abarth Esseeesse 695, a performance car worthy of the Abarth name after years of it being relegated to merely being used as a marketing tool.

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In the days when the Alfa range became all front wheel drive the cry went up from enthusiasts -the majority of whom were never going to buy a new one anyway- for a rear wheel drive model. Thus I am sure that they will all be pleased to learn there will be a RWD Alfa sports car in 2015, although this is a good news/bad news scenario as it is to be a joint development with (whisper it) Mazda.

While this may turn out to be just another of the indignities forced upon the AR badge in recent times (such as using a Holden engine), the reality of car manufacturing to-day is that joint platforms are the only economically viable solution to profitable car making, especially if -as with both protagonists here- you are not a volume player. The models will apparently feature different styling so we will have to wait and see, although no mention has been made at this stage of their having different power units.

There are many shared platforms and/or engines to be found in apparently different makes to-day and no one is really too bothered, the cleverly-structured Volkswagen group being masters in this field. However, Alfa is a bit different to most and is sometimes almost crushed by the weight of its own history, although the past of the company is arguable becoming less important as the traditional Alfa buyer is supplanted by a younger clientele.

The Fiat CEO still speaks of Alfa becoming “a truly global brand” (yawn - we’ve heard that sort of thing so many times in the last ten years!), but while even hardened motoring journalists may bridle at a Hiroshima-built Alfa (after the MiTo, the HiTo?), a well-made car which is true to the values of the marque could go a long way to strengthening its profitability and might just turn out to be the saviour of the name, however unlikely that may seem.

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