

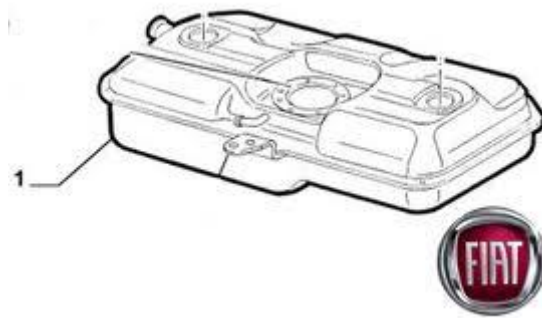
THE RISING COST OF ECONOMY MOTORING



For many years we have run a Fiat Seicento Sporting. In fact, given the way in which time sometimes slips by almost unnoticed the car is 'suddenly' over 11 years old, but as it is fun to drive and suits the use which we give it we have stuck with it. It has never been the most economical car in terms of fuel consumption but has always been fairly cheap to maintain, although as the car ages and non-service parts come up for renewal the reverse is becoming true.



For instance, when the screenwash pump gave up the ghost it turned out that it was not available separately from the reservoir – at a retail of £94.94! Likewise, when one of the front suspension struts lost its fluid and we naturally wanted to replace the pair they retailed at £92.51 each and when the fuel tank did the inevitable and began to separate at its seams (and who else was using metal fuel tanks in the 21st century?) it carried an astounding retail of £467.11!



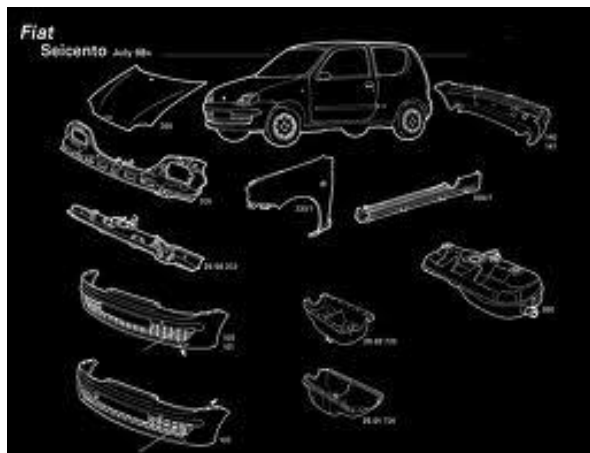
All of these prices include VAT, but even being in the motor trade doesn't make much difference to these costs due to the poor discount codes attached to these items, so alternatives need to be found to make keeping the car on the road a viable proposition. Perhaps it is the manufacturers' plan to price their older vehicles off the road, although how likely would it be that anyone who had experienced such high parts prices would buy another car of the same make?



Fortunately, an alternative part can usually be found and often of original equipment quality too. The washer pump can be matched up with one at the motor factors, Sachs struts can be obtained for about one-third of the Fiat price and even the fuel tank can be sourced at a massive discount. So, where does this leave Fiat? They presumably have plenty of parts on the shelf which people are not buying due to their cost and also due to the cars having been scrapped for the same reason. The latter course of action further undermines new part sales as it makes more secondhand parts available to the remaining owners, so where is the reasoning behind charging so much for things which can be obtained far cheaper elsewhere?



Of course, this situation also applies to models further up the range and while one can accept that Fiat Coupe parts might be priced above the norm (a bonnet is £1074.91, for instance), attaching ridiculous prices to components for a Fiat Marea is equally unproductive in sales and stockholding terms. It is also ironic that latterly Fiat has become much more competitive in their pricing of a wide range of service and wearing parts so the company is obviously aware of the many disparities in its pricing structure, yet at the same time it refuses to address the most glaring of these.



It has often been said that if one bought all of the components of a car individually they would add up to far more than the price of the assembled vehicle and from this it is also recognisable that there is far more money to be made out of aftersales than sales. Given that, it is surprising that manufacturers –and Fiat are not alone here– do not tailor their parts prices to relate to the age and value of their vehicles and thus realise maximum sales rather than maximum stockholding!

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