

Marea - A West Side Story

With apologies to Sondheim *et al*, my high school music teacher and all musical show fans for this light-hearted and possibly irreverent tale of infatuation ..

Marea!
I've just met a car named Marea,
And suddenly that name
Will never be the same
To me.

Marea!
I've just heard the growl of Marea,
And suddenly I've found
How wonderful a sound
Can be!

Marea!
Say it loud and there's music playing,
Say it soft and it's almost like praying.
Marea,
I'll never stop saying Marea!



Just like it's musical counterpoint (sic), this baby is definitely an augmented 4th and could be described as a diminished fifth (but only if compared to the blown Turbo Coupe). We've had our 1999 Marea Weekender 2.0 (station wagon) for 10,000km, nine months, one speed camera fine (well that was about 6hrs after purchase) and two dinged 17" alloy wheels.

The story started somewhere in the depths of a 2002 winter when my beloved (wife, not X1/9), in her capacity as Chief Financial Officer suggested the possibly well performing engineering consultancy should spring for a new chariot. Now that my attention to the conversation was undivided, I asked what she had in mind. Naturally, the important functional features of ABS, air-con and power steering were right up there with my preferences for manual, naturally aspirated and with Tim the Toolman's recommended "more power". Upon further enquiry, a maximum capital outlay and a timeframe of anytime soon were agreed (i.e. advised).

Narrowing the choice to a 2 litre station wagon helped form a (short?) list of Marea, Peugeot 406 SRDT(!), Legacy, Caldina/Corolla, Vectra, Beemer 318, Primera, Legnum and arguably the NZ class leader: Mondeo. And so to the tyre kicking: of which we soon tired. It seemed that most second hand car yards had met budget for the month since helpful sales service was about as plentiful as Weapons of Mass Destruction. The options for manual, non-turbo (sake sucking) imports amounted to both cars on the collective lots. Having driven a particularly inoffensive 1.8 Mitsi (well it was purple: the favorite colour of my wife) from a local and well respected dealer, the salesman, sensing the kill, tried to "Strongarm" me with "I don't know why you just don't buy it since it will meet your needs?" Nonplussed, I replied "I want a 2 litre Marea."

Fortunately for me, Fiat's UK site had information on the then still current Marea range. The research from there and, more particularly, articles from Ewan's car magazine collection sealed my desire for the 150hp 5cyl two-litre version. At 9.2s for the 0-100km/h start it is a good performer in this class. Some comparisons with the other pretenders showed the Fiat stacked up very well albeit with a deficit of 300mm length and 200litres (or about equivalent to ye olde 44gal drum) luggage space. Apart from being a beauty that only a mother would admire, that extra foot of length on the Mondeo would not have fitted my garage in any case!

Euromarque had just taken in a 1.6 Marea Weekender and so we felt obliged to take it for a drive. The sales assistance from Euromarque was particularly refreshing and relaxed. They insisted we test drive the car without a sales chaperone "this is something for you two to decide together". Fortunately (for me) it did not have air-con, as otherwise it drove very well and would have been perfectly adequate. Euromarque recommended that to find exactly what I was after I should keep an eye on the Auckland market since it is such a large proportion of the NZ European car market. To make such research easy for us mainlanders, the NZ Herald has an email alerting system (known as "FYI") that allowed me to get an email when any classified met my search term "Marea". I discovered these cars are in limited supply. Finally, resorting to placing an advert in the Cars Wanted column of the NZ Herald yielded more options.

After discussing the details by phone, obtaining a near perfect AA report and receiving a few digital photos, I called in sick one Friday to fly up, test drive and purchase our Marea. The test drive was dreadful – a poker face deserted me on a test drive around the labyrinth of backstreets and motorways with a chaperone salesman/navigator. I could not conceal a grin every time the heavy jandal was applied. The burble that emanated from the bonnet was divine. Sold. Next the hardship of the delivery drive back to Christchurch – it was a tough job but someone had to do it!

Nine months on, we're very happy with our Weekender. Its hard to say whether I'm happier that Southland kicked the collective Canterbury butt in the NPC or with the Marea. The only downsides are the knowledge of the relatively expensive cambelt and major service at 100,000km and the two dinged alloys. Arguably these are both due to pilot error (the first was on a step change where some asphalt had been 'ground' from the road for resurfacing and the other due to a large pot-hole on a medium-fast sweeper in the Mackenzie basin). That is not to say that I want to lose/sell/be separated from the 17" alloys – even though I read a particular Thema may be wanting some!

Model Summary

The Marea was introduced in 1996 and until recently, was still available new in Europe. The last new models arrived in New Zealand in 2000. A huge variety of models were available in Europe: 1.4, 1.6, 1.8, 2.0 petrol, 1.9 Turbo 75, 1.9 Turbo 100 and the flag carrier 2.4 Turbo 125 diesel, with SX, ELX and HLX fit-out levels. Here, where the Pacific Peso puts out for pasta, only the entry level 1.6SX and 20V 2000cc ELX petrol versions were offered..

Offshore, the current replacement is a toss up between the Stilo Wagon and the Ulysse, neither of which is guaranteed to make it to the sales' lots here.

There were 115 Fiat Marea vehicles registered in NZ between 1997 and 2000 with the following information supplied by Bob Barry of Ateco and the NZ Transport Registry Centre (as of January):

- 39 Marea ELX 2.0 Wagons (4 in Christchurch)
- 33 Marea ELX 2.0 Saloons (none in Christchurch)
- 23 Marea SX 1.6 Wagons (2 in Christchurch)
- 20 Marea SX 1.6 Saloons (3 in Christchurch)

Vital Statistics

1999 Fiat Marea 2.0 ELX Weekender 20V

Engine

- Capacity 1998cc
- Cylinders 5
- Bore 82mm
- Stroke 75.65mm
- Max Power 108kW (147bhp) @ 6100rpm (I have seen 154hp specified)
- Max Torque 186Nm @ 4500rpm

Performance

- 0 to 100km/h 9.2sec

- Max Speed 205km/h (allegedly)

Weight

- Unladen 1315kg

Features

- ABS
- Dual Airbags
- Central Locking
- Power Steering
- Leather Interior
- Alarm / Immobiliser
- Climate Airconditioning
- 6 speaker radio/cassette stereo with CD stacker
- 60/40 Split rear seats
- Two section rear door – lower part opens for flat access to luggage area (1540litre capacity)

Grin Factor :)

Excellent handling and performance (“like a hot-hatch with a car-load of mates”) makes this arguably the most fun & style you can have in a family or commercial vehicle (short of an Alfa 156 JTS wagon...)

Price

Typical retail for this vehicle with low to medium km is around \$18,000 to \$22,000.

Conclusion

Well if you’re still reading, you’re about due for a break!

I've suggested to my wife we should get a white Punto or Uno as a shopping trolley. “Why?” was the response. “So I park up our red, white and green cars in the drive as an Italian flag”. I've no idea why TJ thinks I'm a sick man. Given the unenthusiastic response, maybe this should be my next Fiat:

G.46-4B

Engine: 215hp inverted 6-cylinder Alfa Romeo 115ter
 Max. speed: 312 kmh (J)
 Ceiling: 6050 m
 Range: 500 km
 Weight: 1100 kg
 Max take-off weight: 1410 kg
 Span: 10.10 m
 Length: 8.48 m
 Height: 2,40 m
 Production: 220 units were built from 1948 to 1951.



Ciao
 Neil Allison