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Test Drive : Fiat Grande Punto - A Showstopper



Three years ago, Tata Motors joined hands with Fiat India in what was seen as a move akin to offering the seemingly-drowning Italian firm a straw to clutch and save itself. The deal in a nutshell was that in exchange for access to Fiat technology and the Ranjangaon manufacturing facilities, Fiat India would have access to the Tata Motors service marketing and servicing network. Which meant that both Tata and Fiat passenger cars would be sold jointly from each other's showrooms as is the case today.

While Tata Motors launched its new Fiat engined Indica Vista not so recently, Fiat India was seen to be soldiering on with an ageing range. Not any more though, because with the launch of the Linea first and now the Grande Punto, though ideally it should have been the other way round as the Grande Punto was born first, Fiat India is fighting back.

I've been waiting for the Grand Punto for almost three years now which is when I discussed it in print but several factors combined to delay the launch and the much-needed boost to Fiat India's sagging image within this country.

One major reason the Grande Punto got delayed is because of the Indian government putting in place norms that if adhered to would fetch the manufacturer relief in excise duty. Petrol engined cars needed to be 4 meters in length or less and have an engine displacement of not more than 1.2litres. Designed by Italdesign-Giugiaro in partnership with Fiat's own Centro Stile design

centre, the original Euro-spec Grande Punto measures 4030mm in length, 1687mm in width and 1490mm in height with a wheelbase of 2510mm - dimensions that put it outside the excise relief norms here. The car that's been launched in India has the same wheelbase but dimensions of 3987mm, 1687mm and 1495mm respectively making it eligible for excise relief. That shows in the price of the 1.2L car – 3.99 lakhs, ex-showroom Delhi.