



10271 Fiat 500

By Adrian Barbour

The Creator Expert series of LEGO cars has become very popular, especially with incredible sets like LEGO Designer Mike Psiaki's 2019 Mustang and 2021 Porsche 911 to choose from. Yet sandwiched between these two was 2020's smaller and less iconic 10271 Fiat 500 set by designer Pierre Normandin. In some ways this model could be seen as a step backwards, with its smaller scale and parts count, lack of steering, and less complex building techniques. To be honest, it's a set I could easily have passed on, if only because the vehicle choice isn't one that has much personal appeal for me. But I'm very glad to have had the opportunity to build and review this smaller set, as it really does have a lot to offer - and as we'll see later in this article, it also offers a lot more for those willing to go beyond the official instructions.

Box and Contents

This proved to be the last Creator car to carry

the official 'Creator Expert' branding and logo, before the introduction of LEGO's new adult-targeted 18+ box art. The Fiat 500 is depicted in front of the Colosseum - a tie-in to 2020's 9000-piece 'microscale' architecture set - and the Fiat and Colosseum are also featured (via sticker) on the included canvas painting accessory.

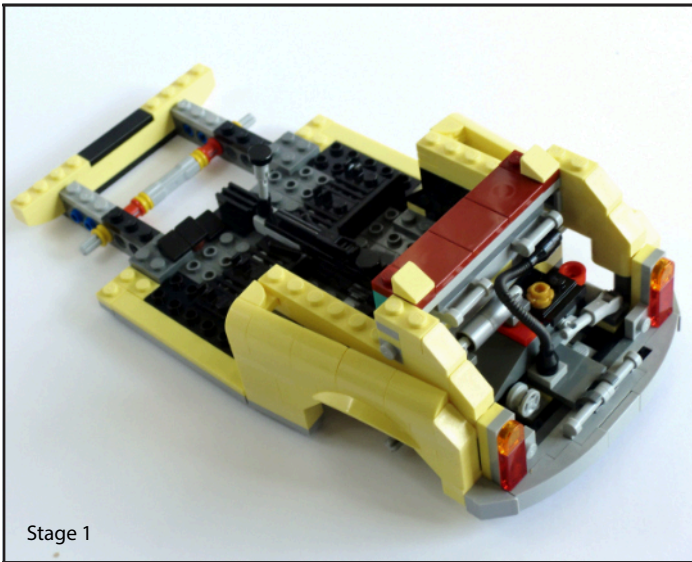
The box itself is much bigger than necessary, and was only about 60% full. Emptying the box provides nine bags across three numbered building stages, sealed instructions with sticker sheet, and a cloth piece bagged with cardboard support. Stickers are used for the art painting, luggage travel stickers, ignition, rear badge, rear grilles, A-pillars, and number-plates (for which there are three options). This does feel like a step backwards, and it would have been nice to have had at least the number-plates printed. The only printed parts in the set are 1x1 round tiles for the Fiat badges and dashboard dials. (You won't see the stickers in this review though, as I have other things planned after the primary build is done.) The instructions have a particularly striking cover,

and also include information on the real car's heritage and the model's design process.

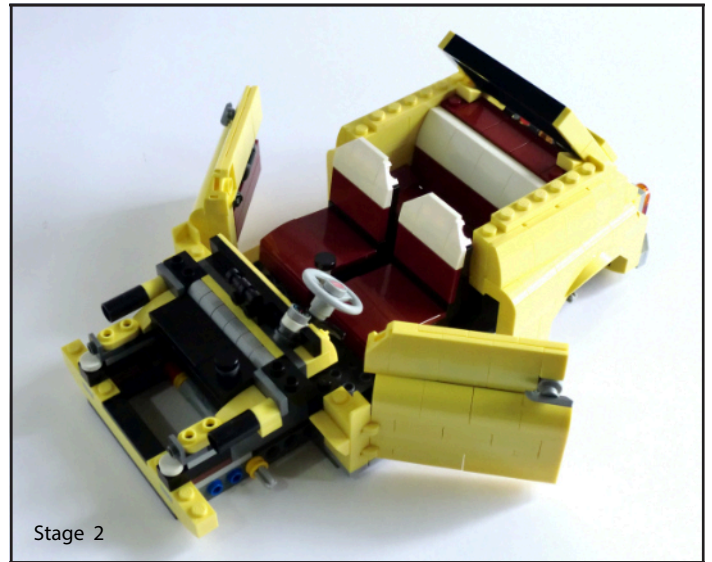
Build Process

The first stage builds the chassis and rear fenders. The chassis is very sturdy, built from Technic bricks and interestingly connected with multiples of Plate 2x4 with Pins (#30157) for the floor. The two-cylinder (13 horsepower!) engine is also built here, and while detailed and technically accurate, somehow the colouring and shaping don't really come together for me in a convincing way. The engine block would benefit from better shaping and better colour-blocking for contrast with the chassis. The rear fenders though are fantastic, and as with the front fenders built later, they are angled inwards on hinge-plates to replicate the Fiat's signature body-shaping. This is quite cleverly built, very secure, and adds a great deal to the look of the final build.

The second building stage builds the doors, seats, and dashboard. The two-tone colouring for the seats is an interesting look, and accurate to



Stage 1



Stage 2



Front



Rear

the real vehicle. Both front seats are hinged for rear access, though they do need to be carefully positioned laterally to avoid interfering with the doors. The combined dashboard and fuel tank are built next, using an interesting SNOT assembly, and leaving space up front for the spare tire. The doors are nicely designed, featuring the signature stepped-ridge on the outside, and manage to include some interior paneling and detail without being too thick. Thanks to the angled rear fenders, they also open and close very smoothly without catching. Unfortunately, there is a half-stud gap left between the rear of the door's upper section and the B-pillar. This is necessary for the door's functioning, but is also quite noticeable.

Stage three completes the model, building the front end, roof, and artistic accessories. Unicorn horns are used well flanking the front Fiat badge, and the same excellent tapering technique from the rear fenders is used again at the front. The windshield is locked securely in place, and connects via 1x1 clips to the roof, providing strength around the hollow left for the fabric

sunroof. The build for the sunroof is simple, yet the resulting mechanism is immensely satisfying to operate, and it looks perfect. The accessories comprise a folding easel and canvas, with a nicely coloured two-tone storage box for the paint palette and paintbrush (or two if you include the spare). Stowing the easel requires putting it through the open sunroof, but these accessories really are a great addition to the set, adding value and character with only a few parts.

Features and Functions

Steering is absent here (and would hardly be feasible given the scale of the set), yet all the functions included here work very nicely. The doors open smoothly, with the front seats hinging forward for rear access. The front hood only opens to about 45 degrees, though this is accurate and provides sufficient access to the spare wheel. The opening engine hatch also provides a secure mounting point for the art storage box accessory. The best function though is definitely the sunroof, which is fun to operate, looks great either open

and closed, and also gives access to the interior cabin detail.

Overall Impressions

The real Fiat 500 is distinctly curved and rounded in ways that are very difficult to capture in LEGO form, even using the latest parts. Yet I think the designer here has done an admirable job. If there's one thing that's not quite there, it's rounded corners for the windscreen from the real car. But with the angled fender sections and the ridge-line along each side, the model is easily recognizable and looks really good even without stickers. And there are plenty of satisfying functions here even without steering. The Bright Light Yellow colour choice also looks nice, though I did notice some colour inconsistency between parts.

The weaker aspects of the model are the engine detail, upper door gaps, stickered A-pillars, and easel storage; while the highlights are the sturdy construction, satisfying functionality, the angled fenders, great accessories, and the canvas sunroof. So, is it a better set than the Ford Mustang or



Porsche 911 Creator cars? Well, no. But being smaller and cheaper than either of those sets, the value here is arguably just as good. The set will appeal to Fiat fans, and would also serve as an excellent introduction for anyone new to the Creator Expert vehicle range. I certainly found myself enjoying the build process and completed model much more than I'd expected to.

This is where a regular review would end, but today we're going the extra mile to see what else can be done with the parts from this set. Single set alternate builds can be tremendous fun, but even the best of us would be hard-pressed to do better than what previous HBM interviewee Firas Abu-Jaber (see HBM011 pp.41-43) has already achieved with his incredible Shelby Cobra alternate build. In fact, his model was so impressive I decided I had to build and review this creation too! (The wheel inserts shown are my own addition but everything else is built purely from the Fiat set's parts.) Instructions for this Shelby Cobra build can be purchased from Firas' website Bricks Garage (www.bricksgarage.com) and are well worth the purchase!

Alternate Build: Shelby Cobra

The build starts with a conventional but very sturdy chassis, featuring a dark red interior for the boot and seats. The dashboard is nicely detailed, and the windshield is securely mounted at a fixed angle with clips and hinge bricks. The build does make use of the sticker sheet, though placement is not the same as for the Fiat, so I've chosen not to apply them here. The rear fenders and quarter panels are really nicely sculpted, and the colour-blocking is impressive. Halfway through the build it still feels like I'm building an A-model rather than an alternate build limited by parts. Only the



underside of the chassis hints at compromises made due to limited parts selection.

The symmetrical side exhausts are very satisfying, though I did eventually swap out the Dark Bluish Grey 1x1 bricks for matching 1L Technic beams/connectors. The engine bay isn't super-detailed, but still looks at least as good as the Fiat's engine. The doors function very nicely, using stacked 1x2 rounded plates behind each door to avoid catching. The sun visors are a bit large, though easily removed. The front grille and headlights are a complex forward-angled sub-assembly, which is locked securely in place by the front fenders and adds a lot to the overall shaping of the front end. One flaw though is the gap left between the opening front hood and the angled windscreen area, and this is quite noticeable when viewed from the side. My only other nitpick is that the steering wheel is left a bit loose in terms of vertical movement, though this can easily be corrected with a few added parts. The build does leave a fair amount of Fiat parts left over, though given the absence of any roof on the Cobra it still used more of the set than I expected.

So how does the Cobra build compare with the set's official Fiat build? If I were comparing two A-models, unrestricted by parts limitations, then

I'd have to say that the Fiat wins – but only by the slimmest of margins. The Cobra build is an absolute masterpiece as an alternate build, and while your mileage may vary, I think most will agree that the Cobra leaves the Fiat behind in the dust as far as source material is concerned. If it weren't for Firas' brilliant alternate build, I probably would have passed on the Fiat set – and that would have been a great pity, as I would have missed out on a really nice official build with great accessories and functions. Yet now that I've built both cars, I can confirm that my copy of the 10271 set will absolutely be remaining in Shelby form for display. The Fiat set is well worth picking up on its own merits, especially if you are a Creator completist or Fiat fan, but with the Cobra as an alternate build it really is too good to pass up.

Again, this is where our article could conceivably end, but as the magazine last spoke with Firas a full decade ago in issue HBM011, I thought I'd reach out to him to ask about his recent work creating alternate builds from Creator Expert vehicles. If you're not already aware, his website also features incredible alternative builds for the 10265 Ford Mustang and 10295 Porsche 911 sets, with his most recent build being a jaw-dropping Lamborghini Countach built as an alternate to the official Porsche set (a model so good I immediately bought a second Porsche set just so I could build it). So here is our bonus designer interview!

HBM: You've been well-known in the AFOL community for many years already for your amazing car models, but what led to your recent focus on single-set alternative-builds over the less restrictive challenge of pure MOC-building?

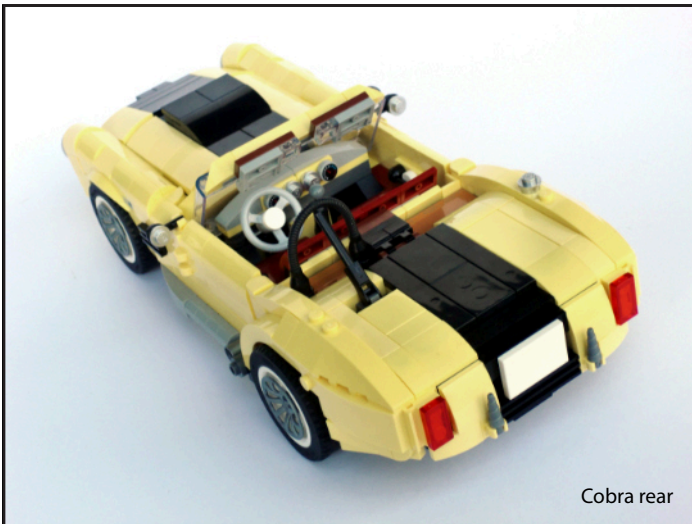
Firas: Ever since I started doing instructions for my designs, I began getting notes from people



Cobra front



Cobra side



Cobra rear



Cobra functions front



Cobra functions rear



Cobra functions side

having a hard time collecting the parts for my MOCs, especially those with rare, expensive or unavailable pieces, such as the Ferrari F40 windshield. This made me look for an easier way to have people enjoy my designs with the least effort possible, and for this there is nothing better than a single-set alternate build, as all you have to do is grab that specific set and then you can start building the model instantly! I still build MOCs out of pieces from my own stock, but most of these I keep unpublished and take to LEGO events.

HBM: Is the Ferrari FXX still your favourite

modern set, or have any of the more recent Creator Expert cars taken over the top spot for you?

Firas: I really loved the new 10265 Mustang set, but yes, the Ferrari FXX is still my favorite set, because it was the reason I got back into LEGO from my dark ages. I was stunned when I first saw the design of that set with all the new great pieces it used.

HBM: What are your thoughts on the official 10271 Fiat 500 build? Do you have any favourite details or points of criticism?

Firas: I do like that set but I don't love it,

maybe because I'm not a big fan of the real car. But design-wise, it's a well constructed set with nice colors. My favorite part is the angled front and rear sides above the wheels – a very creative idea in my opinion! But unfortunately I found the build itself to be a bit fragile.

HBM: How well does the Fiat set rate as a donor/parts pack for MOCs/alt-builds, compared to the other sets you've been working with?

Firas: If I were to sort the sets (which I built alts from) from the most useful to build alternatives down to the least useful, it'd be the



Mustang, the Porsche, then the Fiat. Actually it's very hard to build a good alternative out of it, but it's possible nonetheless.

HBM: How do you choose which vehicle to build as an alternative-build? Why the Shelby Cobra and Mazda Miata for 10271? Have you ever chosen a vehicle for an alt-build but then found it impossible to achieve well with the given parts selection?

Firas: I usually like to challenge myself. I choose most of my alternatives randomly, then keep trying to achieve an acceptable design. Sometimes it's easier, sometimes it's harder. As for the Shelby, I took the choice to build it because of all the 1x2 curved slopes in the Fiat set. I thought I could make a good-looking Shelby using those pieces. As for an unsuccessful alternative, it actually happened one time when I tried to build an Alfa Romeo Giulia Sprint GTA [from the Fiat set] but unfortunately I found it to be impossible.

HBM: Can you briefly outline your alt-model design/building process? How does it differ from pure MOC-building, and how long did the Shelby Cobra design take?

Firas: There's a big difference actually. Building a good-looking model from a limited amount and type of pieces is much harder and sometimes much more frustrating than building a free MOC from my own pieces. The main challenge is making the model sturdy enough, and making it playable with functional elements. Making

a strong chassis is a priority when building alternatives, and then comes the overall look and sturdiness of the overall body. After I've achieved this, I start working on the interior, engine and the smaller details of the model. The Shelby model took me around one month to build.

HBM: What are you most satisfied with in your Shelby Cobra build, and which aspects were the most challenging?

Firas: The answer to both questions is the same – tilting the front end was very challenging to achieve and this is my favorite part of the build. If it wasn't for that feature, I believe the model would look too boxy and straight at the front end.

HBM: You've mentioned before that you have difficulty ordering parts in Jordan, and that you consequently work from limited bricks. Is that still the case, and have things changed for you under covid restrictions over the last year?

Firas: Nothing changed here at all, before or after Covid. It's still the same, and it's still expensive to order pieces online, and very expensive to buy sets from my local LEGO store. That's actually another reason why I decided to build more alternatives, as it's always easier to order official sets online.

HBM: You've also mentioned that you don't use digital design tools when building, but prefer to just dive right in with physical bricks. Has that changed at all now that you're selling instructions

online? And how do you manage to nail the scaling and shaping so well without prior planning?

Firas: It's still the same here as well. I still sit down and start putting pieces together, just like how kids build with LEGO, and just as it is supposed to be in my opinion! I have a professional digital designer who makes the digital instructions for my models. At first I was working with Simone Bissi, but then he got very busy so now I'm working with Ron Hebben of ForelockMocs. Making digital instructions or building digitally is the last thing I'd want to do.

HBM: Do you have any upcoming projects? You've mentioned before your love of the first VW Camper Van set – will you be trying your hand at alt-builds from the just-released new version? Or do you have more planned from the Creator 911 Porsche set?

Firas: Actually both. I have more plans for the Porsche set and I think I'd like to build a couple of alternatives from the new VW set – it looks challenging to build alternatives from, but I'll see what I can do. Hopefully there will be more to come in the future, but I prefer to keep my upcoming projects as a surprise!

We wish to thank LEGO for providing this set for review. The opinions in this review are not supported or endorsed by LEGO.

Special thanks also to Firas Abu-Jaber for contributing his time and comments for this article.