

CLASSIC DRIVER

Tornado Fiat 600GT: Stormchasing with Colin Chapman

Lead

Fiat 600s were a common sight on 1960s roads, with over 2.6 million produced during the car's 14-year lifespan. But the opposite was true of the Tornado 600 – of which just three were built. And one was given Lotus power, following the recommendation of Colin Chapman. We take a closer look...

Created in 1957, the Tornado Car Company built its own sports cars, mainly on the foundations of Ford products common at the time. After seven years of doing so, the company went into liquidation – but this wasn't the last chapter in the brand's history. Accomplished racing driver John Bekaert had monitored the success Carlo Abarth was enjoying by producing reworked and tuned 600s (among other Fiats), and hence he acquired the rights to the defunct marque with the aim of concocting a similar recipe; albeit with a distinctly British flavour.

Bekaert's baby followed the lineage of previous Tornado products by borrowing from Ford's stable – this time the 75bhp 1.5-litre four-cylinder engine, as found in the Cortina 1500GT. Armed with such, the little car was capable of a sprint to 60mph from rest in 8.8 seconds, on its way towards a top speed of 98mph – or 115mph with the alternative final-drive ratio that was offered as an option. Just three Tornado 600s were built; one of them was Bekaert's personal car, specially equipped with an 1850cc Ford engine and good for 130mph.





Bekaert sold another of the 1.5-litre Tornados to his friend David Render, who entered it in competition against its creator. Unsurprisingly, Render's was out of touch with the 'ultimate' 600, but he had a trick up his sleeve. He asked a longtime friend – one Colin Chapman – for his advice on how to outdo his friend-cum-adversary, and soon afterwards a 1.6-litre Lotus twin-cam with 145bhp found itself *almost* nestled in the rear engine bay (hence the permanently raised bootlid). Subsequently, Render accomplished 50 wins in various hillclimb and sprint events in the little whirlwind.



In the early Seventies, Render moved on to larger, more powerful machines, and ownership was passed to Tony Castle-Miller of Fiat and Abarth specialist Middle Barton Garage. After taking part in circuit racing for

several years at the helm of the spritely but unforgiving little machine, 'TC-M' (as he is widely known) decided it would serve better in Abarth 1000 guise, and rebuilt it as such. He sold the set of Tornado parts in the early Eighties, but after 24 years of reconsidering his decision, he promptly assumed the responsibility of reviving the Tornado when the complete package fatefully came back on the market.



Now fully returned to the specification of its Lotus-engined golden era, as pictured here, the car can regularly be seen zipping around the back roads of Oxfordshire, UK. According to TC-M, the fun factor is as apparent as ever beside the comparatively huge sporting 'superminis' of today, and the rear-biased weight distribution prompts comparisons with an early 911 – albeit in a junior form, of course.

Related Links

In the Classic Driver Marketplace, you can find many classic [Abarths](#) and [Fiats](#) for sale

Photos: Michael Ward / Auto Italia

Gallery

Source URL: <https://www.classicdriver.com/en/article/autos/tornado-fiat-600gt-stormchasing-colin-chapman>
© Classic Driver. All rights reserved.