

CLASSIC DRIVER

[Are you ready for the next level of the Fiat Panda 4x4 hype?](#)

Lead

We've been singing the gospel of the Fiat Panda 4x4 and its purist jet-set vibe for ages. Now that a customized first-generation Panda is part of every proper car collection, we think it's time to start worshipping its successor – the Nuova Panda 4x4.



For inhabitants of the Swiss and Italian Alps, the Fiat Panda 4x4 has been a fixture since it was introduced to the world in the 1980s. To create the simplistic, yet iconic design, Giorgetto Giugiaro drew inspiration from folding chairs and helicopters. The car itself was lightweight, easy to maintain, modular, inexpensive to manufacture – and equipped with a Steyr-Puch 4x4 drivetrain that made it almost unbeatable on steep offroad and winter territory. And when Fiat patron Gianni Agnelli showed up in St. Moritz casually driving [his silver Panda 4x4](#) around town, it was clear that the international hautevolée had discovered a new 'It Car'. Naturally, the Classic Driver team soon relied [on its own custom Panda](#) to speed between the Cresta Run, Kulm Hotel and Dracula nightclub. So, when we planned [our own little Classic Driver Panda 4x4 Meet St. Moritz in December 2019](#) at the venerable Suvretta House, we did not expect that a Panda-pandemic would soon grip the world from China to California.



Meanwhile, we have seen [1980s-style Superpandas](#), [electrified classics](#) and [Missoni-clad restomods](#), a [tribute to Indiana Jones](#), a [tailor-made masterpiece by Turnbull & Asser](#), a [stunning six-wheeler](#) and a [grizzly 300 hp R5 Rally-Panda](#). Panda prices have quadrupled, with some of the finest examples offered for sale right here in the Classic Driver Market. But as the first 'Pandalysts' caution buyers that the climax of the hype might soon pass, we feel it's time to pour some fresh gasoline into the fire and announce the next level of the Panda movement: the Nuova Panda 4x4 is becoming a thing!



Designed by Giuliano Biazio at Bertone in close collaboration with Fiat's Centro Stile and built from 2003, the new millennium Panda replaced its predecessor with a way more modern architecture and conventional setup including ABS, EBD and airbags. In fact, the 5-door hatchback was not even supposed to be called Panda, but rather the Fiat Gingo – a name that Renault felt sounded a bit too similar to Twingo, so lawyers were called and the old Panda name was quickly revived. Of course, the Nuova Panda lacked the 1980s jet-set flair and the purism of Giugiaro's shoebox design, but for the discerning alpine dwellers between Cortina d'Ampezzo and St. Moritz, the second-generation car offered just what they had been waiting for: an understated, lightweight, go-anywhere jolly that would take them reliably to the most remote chalets, forests and farmhouses while still looking cool and casual when parked in front of an alpine grand hotel.



And just as Fiat had hoped, the Panda became a great success: it won the Car of the Year award in 2004 and also scored the Compasso d'Oro industrial design award. Even Top Gear's James May bought his own little Nuova Panda after the car ranked 8th out of 152 cars in a survey for reliability and driving experience. Equipped with the 1.4-litre petrol engine and the manual 5-speed gearbox – and still weighting well below a tonne – the new Fiat Panda 4x4 was soon embraced by the Italian police and military, as well as the most non-compromising of the central alps, the Swiss post.



Will the second-generation Fiat Panda 4x4 become a hero of custom car culture, just like its predecessor? We think not. But if you are slowly getting tired of the same old Instagram stereotypes, of drinking the same Negronis, sitting on the same Eames lounge chairs and driving the same 1980s Pandas and Porsches, this new millennium hot hatch might just be your thing. Just put it into your garage next to your 996 Porsche Turbo or your Bentley Brooklands, and you will appreciate the no-nonsense modernity of this wonderful era of automotive design. And here's the best part: we would still welcome you with open arms at our next Classic Driver Panda 4x4 Meet St. Moritz. Pandiamo!

Photos: Andrea Klainguti for Classic Driver

Gallery

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