

Citroën C5

Featured model: 1.8SX 5 door



THE LARGER-FAMILY CAR sector is bristling with attractive offerings. Now Peugeot-Citroën has turned up the heat by introducing its new C5 – as a five door and an estate car, as well.

It's bigger than the old Xantia – not just longer but wider and higher, too, with impressive all-round spaciousness inside. Taller types particularly will appreciate the headroom. The virtually flat rear floor and generous hiproom make this a full five-seater, with loads of luggage space, as well.

What also impressed us was the quality of the interior trim – plastic and Peugeot-Citroën haven't always blended successfully in this respect. The C5, right from the basic LX up, is very impressively finished; outside, too, weatherproof plastic all round protects against foot-scuffing and gravel rash behind the wheels, with cheap and easily replaced plastic bumper inserts to ward off parking scrapes.

Engines include a direct-injection petrol as well as a couple of Di diesels; the larger 2.2 diesel impressed us at launch with its ultra-smooth low-speed manners, as well as its vigorous acceleration. With a particle-trap in the exhaust, this is the 45mpg diesel of the future, but at a hefty first cost.

For £3100 less, you can still enjoy the SX's worthwhile standard features in this 1.8-litre petrol version. These include automatic air conditioning with side-to-side temperature variation. This works

effectively, but there are times when it does things you don't want, so you resort to manual control. Likewise, we weren't fully sold on the behaviour of the automatic wiping and lighting; we would have preferred a rear tailgate wiper.

The 1.8's modest performance is accompanied by very acceptable mechanical refinement – it just grows more throaty when revved harder, but not when cruising at 70 or more.

The C5 corners competently, but it's the ride that still enables it to offer something special compared with the competition. Sometimes it does get caught on the hop, but generally this (now much simplified) gas-and-oil suspension works better than ever, making some familiar bumps and ruts well-nigh disappear. This absorbency enhances the C5's directional stability, as well, although in truth, the steering response isn't razor-sharp.

The emphasis on comfort is clearly on view in the back seat area, which is well designed – yet the seat split/folds, too, to give excellent luggage-carrying versatility.

VERDICT

The C5 is commodious, comfortable and, with several unique convenience features, still a bit different from mainstream rivals. This 1.8SX is keenly priced, as well, although the admittedly more desirable larger engines carry a hefty price premium that spoils all that. If it proves reliable, the C5 deserves to succeed.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	★★★★○
Space/practicality	★★★★○
Controls/displays	★★★★○
Safety	★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★★○
Comfort	★★★★○
Fuel economy	★★★○○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1749cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 117bhp at 5500rpm, 120 lb ft at 4000rpm; belt-driven double overhead camshafts, 16 valves

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 21.8 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 18.2 in 4th

suspension front: independent struts with hydropneumatic pressurized spheres. Rear: independent trailing arms with spheres, interconnected with front (three-position ride height with interior control)

steering hydraulic power assistance; 3.2 turns lock-to-lock; 10.65m diameter turning circle between kerbs (17.05m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear, with anti-lock and brake-assist controls

wheels/tyres 6in alloy with 195/65R15H tyres (Michelin Energy XHI on test car); black-painted (LX style) alloy spare

LIKES ...

rear headrests fit flush with seats
double sun visors each side
side-to-side heat controls (except LX)
ingenious oddments stowage spots
wash/wipe pattern and timing ideal

and GRIPES

bulky handset/key
back seats can't be locked from boot
some creaks and rattles
rear sunblind smelly

THE C5 RANGE

size and type upper medium (mid-priced) hatchback and estate car

trim levels LX, SX, Exclusive, Exclusive SE
engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.75 litre/117bhp, 4/2.0/138, 4/2.0(Di)/143, V6/2.95/210
diesel: 4/2.0/110, 4/2.2/136 – both Di
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (4-speed stepped automatic with torque converter optional)

OVERTAKING ABILITY ★★★★○					
<i>Stays with the pack, despite less power on paper; flags on hills, though. Adequate gearshift quality. No low-speed roughness or engine noise at legal speeds</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	3.5	10.6	13.7		
30-50mph	4.3	10.3	13.0		
40-60mph	5.2	10.5	13.1		
50-70mph	6.6	10.6	14.0		
30-70mph	10.9	20.9	27.0		
max speed in each gear (*using 6000rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	30	55½	81	109	120

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★★★○			
<i>Flat floor and five proper belts make C5 a full five-seater. Load deck uniformly wide and (despite sill) can be raised or lowered via suspension – as can seating (good for the less spry)</i>			
<i>in centimetres (5-door hatch)</i>		inside († without sunroof)	
outside		front - legroom	86-109
length	462	- headroom	97/102†
width - inc mirrors	211	rear - typical leg/	99/
- mirrors folded	188	kneeroom	77
height (no roof bars)	142-148	- headroom	95
load sill height	18/70	- hiproom	137
(inside/outside)	(+4/ -6)*	load space (all seats in use)	
steering		(litres/cu ft)	565/20.0
turns lock-to-lock	3.2	load length	90-156
turning circle (metres)	10.65	full length to fascia	263
easy to park/garage?		load width	115-128
	★★★★○	load height (to shelf/	52/
* suspension raised/lowered		to top of aperture)	80

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★★○	
<i>Accurate speedo with sensible 30/50/70 markings. Front seats soft – almost too laid back, despite height adjusters; no lumbar resetting, though</i>	



HOW THE C5 5 DOOR COMPARES

	engine cyl/cap/power (no/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes – best stop from * 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering - turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
CITROEN C5 1.8	4/1749/117	3210	10.9	26.9/20.9	37½	26½/22	109	99/77	3.2/10.65	462
Ford Mondeo 1.8	4/1798/125	3170	9.8	27.4/18.9	36½	25/19	111	108/84	2.8/11.3	473
Renault Laguna 1.8	4/1783/123	3370	11.2	26.1/19.0	37	25/12	110	97/71	3.2/10.9	458
Honda Accord 1.8	4/1850/136	3380	10.2	26.2/18.9	32	26½/15	109	100/73	3.1/11.1	459
Vauxhall Vectra 1.8	4/1796/115	2940	11.1	28.6/20.8	38½	24/18	111	101/73	3.0/10.9	450
Mazda 626 2.0	4/1991/115	2720	8.9	28.2/19.2	32	28/24	111	101/75	3.0/10.9	448

* all with ABS

SAFETY ★★★★○	
<i>Short pedal travel but no longer too sudden – consistent and fade-free, with better handbrake, as well. Tailgate locks, once on the move, but boot access too easy from interior</i>	
braking	dry road stopping distance
pedal feel	from 50mph (with brake-assist ABS)
in emergency	pedal load distance
handbrake	unhurried 10kg 31m
	sudden 22kg 26½m best stop
	+4kg ie 26kg 27m

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS
C5 not yet tested

SECURITY FEATURES	
central locking	✓ alarm 0
remote control	✓ immobiliser ✓
auto window closure	✓ luggage security
deadlocks	★★★★○
✓ standard	0 factory option * not available

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★★○	
<i>Set up for soft and easy, rather than pin sharp response – yet little cornering roll. "Like a well-behaved marshmallow," said one tester</i>	



COMFORT ★★★★○	
<i>A French car that knows all about neglected UK byways – absorbent, unfurled, even over road humps. Some "noises-off", however</i>	

FUEL ECONOMY ★★★★○	
<i>A commendable result, with no refuelling hassles and a superb range between forecourt visits. Our trip computer was 7-8% pessimistic, however</i>	

type of use (air conditioning off)	AA test (mpg)
urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	24
suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	30½
motorway (70mph cruising)	38½
cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	37½
rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	43½
typical mpg overall	37½
realistic tank capacity/range	61 litres/500 miles
official mpg (urban/extra urban/combined)	26.6/47.1/36.7
CO ₂ emissions 182g/km	car tax band C