

FIRST
DRIVE

Citroën C5

Featured model: 5-door saloon



THE LARGER FAMILY CAR SECTOR is bristling with attractive offerings. The accomplished Peugeot 406 saloon was complemented by the five-door Citroën Xantia in the battle for sales against, among others, the acclaimed Ford Mondeo and the safe and comfortable Renault Laguna. Now Peugeot-Citroën has turned up the heat by introducing its new C5 – first as a five door, soon to be 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 version (not yet driven) to augment the now familiar two-litre Di diesel; however, it's the new 2.2HDI diesel that impressed us. This uses balancer shafts to smooth away any vestige of low rpm vibration, yet it pulls with the vigour that we've come to expect – only more so.

It deserves an extra plaudit for its ultra-clean exhaust, thanks to the adoption of a particle trap in the system; you can literally

stick your finger up the tailpipe without having to wash your hands afterwards.

Of course, this engine will use more fuel and incur higher tax than the ordinary 2.0HDI but even that unit's installation results in greater smoothness than in the 406s or Xsaras we've sampled.

The 1.8 16v base engine is perfectly adequate and unobjectionable, but it's PSA's diesels that catch the limelight – pending the arrival of the 2.0HPi direct injection petrol version.

The other technical talking point must be the retention of Citroën's familiar (albeit much simplified) gas and oil springing. Hydractive 3, as it's called, has (you guessed it) computer control, yet it still retains the advantages of self-levelling (adapting to different loads) and variable ride height. The brakes and steering are no longer part of the plot, however, and hydraulic connections are drastically reduced.

In normal use, the resultant ride is softer and more absorbent than steel-sprung rivals, but the C5 does get caught on the hop occasionally; it tends to jiggle and jelly-wobble sometimes and the steering response isn't razor-sharp.

VERDICT

The C5 is commodious, comfortable and, with several unique convenience features, still a bit different from other fleet/family car contenders. The finish is good, but we will have to wait and see if it's reliable, as well. If so, the C5 will deserve much greater success than the Xantia achieved.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★★○
Comfort	★★★★○
Space/practicality	★★★★○

VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

length x width (folded mirrors)	462x188
front- legroom	86-109
- headroom (no sunroof)	96-102
rear- typical legroom	99
- typical kneeroom	76
- headroom	94
- hiproom	137
load space (all seats in use)	
(litres/cu ft)	585/20.4
load length (seats up/folded)	94/155
load width	116-128
load sill height (inside/outside)	16-66
boot/load aperture height	52/80

THE C5 RANGE

type and size 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)

notable features particle filter on 2.2HDI; parking sensors plus electric door mirror folding, satnav option with video input socket; Trafficmaster standard on all, automatic headlamps and wipers

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

poor dial markings
 no "Auto" heater without air con on
 no rear wiper
 twin visors both miss area near pillar
 back seats can't be locked from boot