

FIRST
DRIVE

Citroën C5 Estate



AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

THE C5 ESTATE RANGE

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

trim levels LX, SX, Exclusive, Exclusive SE

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.75 litre/117bhp, 4/2.0/13.8, 4/2.0(DI)/143, V6/2.95/210

diesel: 4/2.0/90 or 110, 4/2.2/136 - all DI

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; 4-speed stepped automatic (with torque converter) optional

notable features static and dynamic ride height adjustment, speed-sensitive ICE volume, rain-sensitive screen wipers, Hydractive (gas and oil) suspension. Option: parking assistance pack

ALTERNATIVES

LOAD VOLUME (all seats in use)

Citroën Xsara	litres 555/19.7 cu ft
Volvo V70	507/17.9
Skoda Octavia	630/22.2
VW Passat	495/17.5
Ford Focus	575/20.4

VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

length x width (folded mirrors)	476x188
front - legroom	86-109
- headroom	NA
rear - typical legroom	99
- typical kneeroom	76
- headroom	101
- hiproom	137
load space (all seats in use) (litres/cu ft)	555/19.7
load length (seats up/folded)	105/177
load width	114-133
load sill height (inside/outside)	2/55*
boot/load aperture height	43/82
* at mid-point	

LIKES ...

twin side storage boxes in load area
metal covering for load sill
nearside mirror "dips" with reverse
rain-sensitive window/sunroof closure

and GRIPES

seat lumbar adjustment missed on LX
vague dial markings
left footrest too close
heater fan goes off with engine

THIS LATEST CITROËN IS JUST asking to be an estate car. Its special suspension means that it will always ride and corner the same, irrespective of how much (or how little) load is on board.

Then there's the physical nature of the gas and oil springs that makes it easy to achieve a uniformly wide load platform, with no wheelarch intrusion.

Citroën has taken things one stage further with the C5, however, by providing a button-controlled variable static height adjuster; the virtually flat and metal-clad, load sill is raised (or lowered) from the norm, over a range of 16cm (6½in), to suit the task in hand.

Inside, load length is enhanced by the estate's extra 14cm external length, but load height beneath the roller-blind cover isn't as good as the hatchbacks. In other vertical respects, however (tailgate aperture height, rear headroom), the estate has the advantage – again, because it's 4cm taller.

The SX costs about £1000 more than the still well-kitted LX – the same premium as that levied on the estate bodywork, compared with the hatch. However, you get some useful additions in the SX. For example, there are roof bars, a reversible load deck mat (carpet one side, washable plastic on the other) plus a two-location vertical safety net/screen, which will deter a sliding load or a dog from reaching you up front.

In the cabin a simple air con button is upgraded to sophisticated climate control

with side-to-side temperature variation, electric windows all round plus a dual-mode (Sport or Comfort) suspension control.

Beyond the SX, the extras are as much aesthetic as functional, and with the most interesting engines (2.0-litre direct-injection petrol or 2.2 DI diesel) their price tags begin to encroach into Volvo and Audi territory. We see a lot of depreciation looming when the novelty has worn off.

No, the C5 LX shares all the models' main assets as a versatile load-carrier: clever concealed struts for the tailgate, a separate opening rear window and even alloy wheels are all there – although in the last case, you wouldn't know it by appearances.

Our assessment included a drive in the latest direct-injection petrol version. If you weren't told, you wouldn't be able to tell it apart from a conventionally aspirated two-litre; it's the mpg and emission figures that are driving this transition and Citroën is adopting a softly-softly approach to its introduction.

VERDICT

This estate is a very versatile maid-of-all work, but watch the price; there's not much engine choice on the lower rungs of the ladder and the cost rises steeply as you climb. Our choice would be the 2.2HDI SX, but that's £2600 more than the petrol equivalent. Still, it might just be worth it.