

Citroën XM 3.0 V6 SEi Automatic



THE OLD CX WAS TOO QUIRKY AND unorthodox ever to be a big seller. It's 'love me or hate me' character has been transposed to Citroën's latest executive car, but in a more diluted form. The styling is still eye-catching and, it has to be said, still makes seeing out and manoeuvring a problem, but its useful five-door configuration makes it both adaptable and very comfortable to travel in – so long as you're not too tall, because headroom is limited.

Of course, the special Citroën hydropneumatic suspension makes the car feel different on the road – it's the company's solution to providing a big car that can handle the bends and soak up the bumps at the same time. It works very well when you're really pressing on or when the roads are really poor – but minor ruts and ridges around town create undue minor disturbance. Because its rivals with

conventional springing have got better, the gap has narrowed to the point where the XM is no longer clearly superior in ride or cornering prowess. Where it does still score, however, is if you carry a wide range of payloads – the XM has a consistency of response that few can then match.

The XM is less quirky in control and has conventional instruments, while this Automatic has a fine transmission with a pleasant selector action – yet it's also clever when left to its own devices. Tall gearing in top means impressive motorway refinement and economy, but it hangs on to the lower ratios around town in a way that doesn't suit our speed limits.

Performance is swift from the 3.0 litre V6, with a slightly more raucous 24-valve version available for those who want even more. The inherent imbalance of a 90 degree V6 is well contained by the special

Living with the XM . . .

crankshaft – which means smoothness when revved and no noises off.

This latest car stopped better than our previous 2.0-litre version and its ABS is standard. So, too, is the automatic climate control, which works well enough on its automatic setting but has snags when you try to do other things with it. It's peculiar to have a sunroof, as well, but there's no cruise control and the parking brake is no more endearing with familiarity than it is on first encounter.

The driving position is generally convenient and comfortable, and there's good legroom and seat support in the back. Some people sniff at versatile five-door cars in this executive class, but, practically speaking, the XM loses little in comfort to less adaptable rivals, thanks to its extra rear glass screen and load cover with sunblinds.

Although it has a catalysed exhaust as standard, fuel economy is respectable – especially on longer trips and although it requires specialised dealer servicing, the XM is more reassuring in build quality than Citroëns used to be. The anti-rust warranty terms could be more generous, though.

With a Peugeot counterpart pursuing a more mainstream course in the bid for sales, this Citroën is still a bit special – a bit different. Motoring pundits often applaud such an attitude – and then go off and but something else! But the XM has very practical, everyday assets as well as its intriguing novelties, that emphasise its common sense appeal.

It's comfortable, adaptable, well-priced and, at present, holds its value well. This V6 version seems the natural way to buy it, conferring upon it the swiftness and ease of response such a big, smooth car deserves.

At the Wheel

Driving position

You sit low in relation to the pedals, with a lot of weight thrown on to the lower spine – fortunately, the lumbar adjuster redeems the situation. Headroom is not over-generous, however, and the front of the cushions tend to promote too much thigh support for shorter types who might otherwise use the electric adjuster to raise the seat more. The electrically adjustable centre armrest cum console is a gimmick because it gets in the way of the gear selector if you raise it. We've experienced a better seat-wheel-pedal relationship, but there's plenty of legroom for the lanky.

Controls and displays

The small diameter speedo has a fussy closeness in its markings and the distance recorder reads a ridiculous 6 per cent long. This is all that makes the trip computer readings inaccurate, because the fuel-flow computer agreed precisely with our professional test rig.

We found both the 24-message warning display panel and the oil level gauge helpful, but the bleep that accompanies every movement of the indicator stalk is likely to be appreciated only on noisy motorways or when lane-changing – or perhaps by those who set their wrist watches to sound on the hour. In fact, there are all the signs of hi-tech for the sake of it, in the radio-cassette player, air conditioning and closely spaced minor controls all over the place. The radio buttons on the steering wheel are valued, however, because those on the set are so difficult to find.

We liked the gearshift quadrant's sensible action but not the parking brake – more of that later, under 'Safety'. It's a pity there isn't a no-cost option for a

handbrake, as there is for a manual shift.

Vision

The XM is intimidating around town or in parking manoeuvres. It's an art to line it up with the kerb, let alone be sure where both ends are. Electrically controlled door mirrors help, but even here, the nearside one is partially obstructed by the screen pillar. The interior mirror offers a letter-box view over the boot spoiler and the visors (including the small one in the middle) aren't deep enough. Fortunately, the reach and rake adjustable wheel ensures a clear outlook over the top of the rim, however, and the twin wipers are noisy but clear a good view. One-shot or normal electric window control for the driver is a nice detail.

Driver satisfaction

Out on the open road, the XM is transformed into a real pleasure to drive. The auto 'box is interesting because the top ratio acts like an overdrive and permits no slush-pump slip as you accelerate firmly – it changes down readily, however, and does so even on the overrun at about 37mph. The shift slips neatly into '3' for a manual downchange if you prefer and the detent button is conveniently placed for 2nd. The only trouble is that you sometimes feel guilty about not being able to change up soon enough – it won't take third until 31mph and top comes 10mph later – this doesn't favour fuel economy when you drive gently.

The unorthodox suspension acquits itself well, in conferring agile, roll-free cornering with good grip and directional certainty. The 'sport' setting is useful for those who prefer a generally tauter feel, but in effect, the 'black box' responds quicker than you can throw the car into a sudden swerve, firming things up whenever

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph	0-60mph	1/4 mile
	3.9	10.3	17.7

THROUGH THE GEARS	30	40	50	60	70
		1.5	3.9	6.4	9.1

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
SPEED RANGES USING KICKDOWN		3.0	4.9	5.2	

Maximum speeds

using accelerator kickdown

REVS PER MINUTE	1st/2nd	3rd	4th	mph
	5350	5250	5350	
				134
				98
				68
				38

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: unleaded Premium, 95 octane

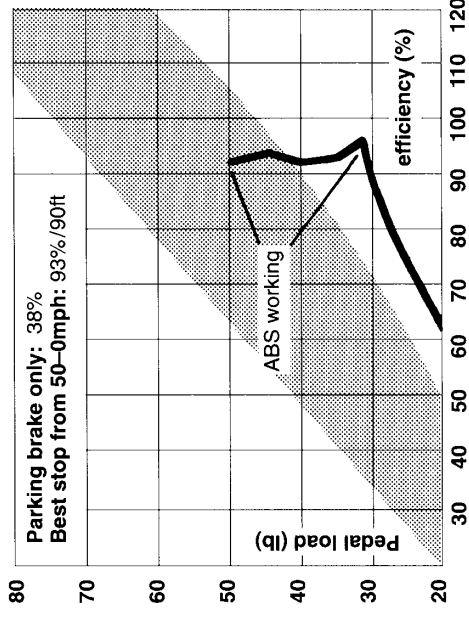
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	21
Short journeys in the suburbs	19
Motorway – 70mph cruising	28 1/2
Brisk driving, mixed roads	25 1/2
Gentle driving – rural roads	26 1/2

Typical mpg overall	25
Realistic tank range*	80 litres/440 miles

* based on gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes How pedal loads affect braking



Braking efficiency shown as a percentage of gravity (ie 100% = 1.0g). Ideally the braking curve should fall within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light – particularly on cars without ABS. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

Fade test

How hard use or water affects braking. (Ideal brakes show no change.)

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

25	At start of test
25	After constant use
32	After severe use
NA	After watersplash
NA	Number of stops to recover

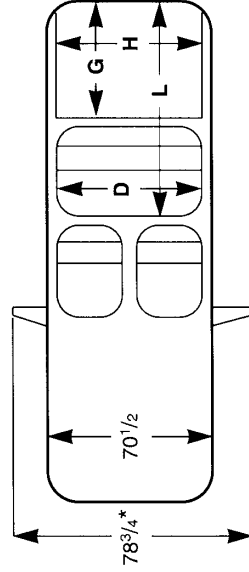
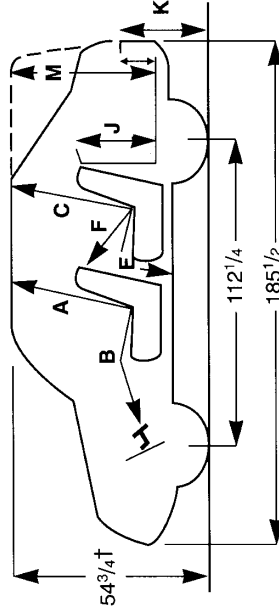
Safety check list

Steering	true 'feel' of the road?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Brakes	powerful?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	sensible effort?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	fade resistant?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Seatbelts	front – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	rears – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Head restraints	front – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	rear – effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interior	thoroughly padded?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fuel	shielded filler?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	protected tank?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

* sensible only if ABS is fitted

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



* 73 1/2 with mirrors folded

Inside (inches)

Kerb weight in lb (full of fuel)

A Front headroom	35 1/4 - 36 1/4	G Load length	37 1/2
B Front legroom (min - max)	35 1/2 - 44	H Load floor width (min - max)	44 - 55 1/2
C Rear headroom	35 1/2	J Load height	18 1/4
D Back seat width (between armrests)	53	K Sill height (inner/outer)	5 24 1/2 †
E Typical rear * legroom	40 3/4	L Load length	60 1/2
F Typical rear * kneeroom	32 1/4	M Load height (to tailgate hinge)	29 1/2

* 'Typical' represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger's seat set at 41in with engine running (less when parked)

needed. Whether the XM handles better than the best conventionally sprung current rivals, even those without four-wheel drive, is a moot point, however.

Space & Comfort

Seating and ride comfort

There's a palatial feel about the leather and veneer bedecked V6 SEi – so long as you don't wear your crown in the back. Other rear dimensions are generous, as is seat support. Convenience features include a lot of courtesy-cum-reading lamps, centre armrests and even B pillar-mounted fresh air vents. This means you get the comfort and convenience of a saloon in a practical hatchback – right down to an extra rear glass screen to keep unpleasant draughts at bay.

The ride is generally smooth and absorbs bigger bumps well; its weakness is that the low-profile tyres excite minor fretting that the suspension allows through to body and trim fittings. This is a fault that occurs at lower speeds on minor roads, it must be stressed, but it does take the edge off your feeling of being pampered.

Luggage and oddments stowage

Both the extra glass and the load cover, with its inbuilt sunblinds, promote passenger well-being but complicate serious load carrying; neither is the folding back seat split – this is an optional extra for most versions, though not for this top SEi. Nonetheless, it's still a more versatile car than many saloons in the Executive sector, and the low sill is made even lower when the car is parked and has settled. Oddments' room is well conceived, with useful pouches on the front seatbacks and soft-lined cubicles up front.

Getting in and out

The central locking has a remote-control button on the folding key fob – a nice idea, but ours worked erratically. Newcomers dislike the

Mercedes-style pull-to-open exterior door handles, but familiarity will overcome this objection, we believe – and they are a sensible safety feature. The tailgate release is stiff, though.

Heating and ventilating

The fully automatic climate control includes air conditioning on this top version. It works quite well on Auto, but the screen/vent position allows cold draughts to the feet. Another problem is that the little green 'on' lights are too dim to see by day – it's easy to leave the AC compressor on when you don't need it, and you can't see how fast the booster fan is going. We found the controls easy to understand, though why the temperature display is in Celsius, yet the ambient temperature on the other side of the fascia is in Fahrenheit, defeats us. There's a sunroof as well – which seems odd with air conditioning – but this spoils itself by buffeting badly at lower speeds.

Money Matters

Value for money

Currently, this SEi V6 is £3500 dearer than the identically powered Si. For the extra you gain wood and leather, the automatic climate control, seatbelt tensioners, an electric armrest and heated seats inside, and alloy wheels outside. After 18 months, you get two-thirds of that back in higher resale value, but in any case, XM depreciation is at present far lower than for domestic big sellers such as the Granada and Carlton, fitting in not too far behind the German giants in this Executive league; this is a new experience for Citroën, because the old CX depreciated heavily.

In service

If you peer beneath the plastic covers over the engine, a mass of wiring and untidy plumbing is revealed. Attention to such detail is not as convincing as on some rivals, and previous big Citroëns

haven't been particularly reliable. It's easy to exaggerate the vagaries of the unique suspension, however, and Citroën does give extended warranty cover on the hydropneumatic components. Parts' prices are very competitive with those of domestic big names and are much cheaper than most imports'.

Warranty and insurance

Group 7 insurance is to be expected, but the six-year anti-rust warranty does need annual checks at the owner's expense to keep it valid. The mechanical and equipment items are covered for 12 months, with the exception of the suspension, which is guaranteed for another year or 65,000 miles – whichever occurs first.

Fuel economy

This isn't at all bad for a 3-litre automatic in overall terms, but our range of consumptions reveals that it's long main road runs that show this XM in the most favourable light – where the transmission's lock-up facility pays off in that tall top ratio. Conversely, gentle touring round the lanes means it seldom sees top, while economy also suffers for the law-abiding around town, because it won't even engage third unless you break the 30 limit and read 34mph on the speedo – 31 true, actually.

Backed up by a gauge, a low-level lamp and a separate message display, the realistic range is excellent. The tank clearly holds more than Citroën's quoted figure – but watch out when filling it because the nozzle seems to be fooled and fuel belches back before the cut-off latch is able to respond. With a catalyser, it's unleaded all the way, of course.

Safety

Accident avoidance

With standard anti-lock control, this latest test car's brakes are most reassuring – once you are used to the unusually short pedal travel. The discs at the front are larger in

diameter on current cars and we certainly experienced no serious fade, while the Bendix ABS seemed smarter than before – losing only 4 per cent efficiency. Our graph reveals all, including a 50–0mph panic stop that's just a little below average.

The parking brake arrangement is less of a pain on this automatic – simply because you can avoid using it – P on the quadrant is far more convenient. Still, there will be times when both are necessary, so be ready to wave your left leg in the air.

Injury prevention

This SEi's front seatbelts retract themselves in hard braking or on impact; we found the centre buckles could make contact with the driver's elbow at times, though. The back seat has three inertia reels – still unusual – and although the buckles flop about, the shoulder harnesses are well routed. Under the bonnet, we are uneasy about the position and vulnerability of the live battery terminal – it looks too easy to make metal to metal contact in a crash.

Durability

Reliability

Citroën's of old did rust more than they should and the sheer complexity of the design could cause problems in service. Over the years, things have improved considerably (since the advent of the BX, in fact) and with proper care and maintenance the XM should give good service. But it's still not a car to neglect or to be interfered with by non-specialist repairers.

HOW IT COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	Fuel overall (mpg)	Brakes * best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (in)	Steering † turns/circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Citroën XM 3.0 V6 (automatic) ^c	2975/170	134	9.1	25	96/33	44	40 ³ / ₄ /32 ¹ / ₄	3.0/35 ¹ / ₄	185 ¹ / ₂
Rover 827 24v (automatic)	2675/177	132	8.5	26	100/40	42	39 ¹ / ₂ /29 ³ / ₄	3.3/38 ¹ / ₄	185
Vauxhall Senator 3.0i (manual)	2969/175	136	8.9	28 ¹ / ₂	101/50	42	43/32	3.2/34 ³ / ₄	190 ³ / ₄
Ford Granada 2.9Efi (automatic)	2933/150	126	9.4	26	107/60	43	44/34	2.9/34 ¹ / ₂	183 ³ / ₄
Alfa Romeo 164 3.0 V6 (manual)	2959/192	141	7.2	28	92/60	43	39 ³ / ₄ /32	3.3/34 ³ / ₄	179 ¹ / ₄
c: catalyser fitted					* all with ABS			† all power assisted	

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 90 degree V6; water-cooled. 93mm bore x 73mm stroke = 2975cc. All-alloy block and heads, with four main bearings and offset crank pins

Compression ratio 9.5:1

Valve gear chain-driven twin overhead camshafts, actuating two valves per cylinder via rockers, with hydraulic tappets

Fuel system Bendix multi-point electronic fuel injection fed from 80-litre (17.6-gallon) tank, with low-fuel warning display. Regulated three-way catalyser and Lambda sensor standard. Fuel required: unleaded only, 95 octane minimum

Ignition system fully programmed electronic, integrated with fuel management

Maximum power (DIN-net) 170bhp at 5600rpm

Maximum torque (DIN-net) 170 lb ft at 4600rpm

TRANSMISSION

Type ZF 4-speed automatic with hydrokinetic torque converter

Gearbox epicyclic 4-speed and reverse with converter by-pass, giving lock-up in 3rd and top.

Ratios: first 2.32, second 1.26, third 0.90 and top 0.67:1

Final drive 4.28:1, to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm (theoretical) 25.1 in top, 18.6 in 3rd

Rpm at 70mph (observed) 2800 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by MacPherson struts with hydropneumatic spheres and an anti-roll bar. Rear: independent by trailing arms with hydropneumatic spheres and an anti-roll bar. Front-to-rear interconnection with automatic self-levelling, manual ride height control and 'Hydramatic' automatic spring/damping stiffness adjustment (also manual control)

Steering power assisted rack and pinion with 3 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 35¹/₄ft between kerbs, with 51³/₄ft for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 6J alloy with 205/60R15V tyres (standard Michelin MXV 2 on test car)

Brakes 11.1in ventilated discs front, 8.8in plain discs rear, with hydraulic power assistance and Bendix ABS anti-lock control. Pedal-engaged parking brake to front wheels

