



Citroën Xsara Estate

Featuring 1.4LX



What's different?

Citroën's ZX – replacing Xsara now gets the estate car treatment. The cargo-swallowing line-up shares hatchback's power units and trim levels.

IT'S EARLY DAYS YET, BUT LIKE ITS ZX forerunner, Citroën's Escort-class Xsara hasn't exactly raced to the head of the sales charts. The Xsara may be a little lacking in the "wow" factor, but beneath its (to some eyes) slightly awkward, rump-heavy lines, lies a roomy and more endearing development of the old ZX and closely related Peugeot 306.

Powered by a choice of 1.4, 1.6 and 1.8-litre petrol engines, plus Peugeot/Citroën group's venerable 1.9-litre diesel (with or without a turbo), the three-door (coupé) and five-door hatchbacks were joined earlier this year by this spacious estate version. It provides a roomy load-carrier for families where the kitchen sink often has to come along as well.

Having previously tried the five-door in its poshest and most powerful (112bhp) form, as the 1.8 16v Exclusive (see R9775), we headed for the opposite end of the scale to sample the estate. The 75bhp 1.4

engine is essentially a carry-over from the old ZX; the same 1360cc unit you'll find in a 1.4 Peugeot 306 – or the smaller Saxo, if you prefer. Available in X or LX trim, the 1.4 estate provides deceptively roomy cargo-carrying potential – biggest in class according to Citroën, as well as out-swallowing a few larger estates like the Vectra and Audi A4.

The estate, which is 9cm longer than the five-door, has a high, wide and handsome tailgate to load through, a low loading lip and generous depth under the roller-blind load cover. Citroën has also managed to squeeze in a pair of storage compartments in the back – boosting the hatchback's already generous supply of assorted cubby boxes and hidey holes still further. The estate car treatment yields an extra 4cm of headroom for back seat passengers, who not only sit in the same expansive comfort as they do in the hatchback, but also appreciate big, wide-opening rear doors, that make loading and unloading so much easier.

It's not all sweetness and light, though. Of four trim levels, only the top SX and Exclusive (available only with 1.8 or turbo-diesel power) provide split-folding of the back seat – an oversight, we feel, given that the LX should be the most popular seller, and that this feature is more often expected (and *used*) in an estate. It is at least available in a comfort pack that also includes rear head restraints, tilt-adjustable front

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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.4	5.2	9.1	14.0
IN 5TH GEAR		7.4	14.9	22.8	31.9
IN 4TH GEAR		5.3	10.5	15.9	22.1

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		14.9/10.6	15.4/10.6		
			14.9/10.5	17.0/11.6	

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	mph
		6000*		6000	5200	
						28 74 107
						52 97

*for best acceleration

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade: unleaded Premium, 95 octane

Type of use – air conditioning not fitted* **mpg**

In the city – heavy traffic 25

In the country – quiet driving 53

Typical mpg overall 38

Realistic tank range 50 litres/420 miles

(based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience – not nominal tank capacity)

*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2–4% in winter and 4–8% in summer

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type front-mounted, transverse four cylinder in line. Alloy block and head; five main bearings

Size 75.0 x 77.0mm = 1360cc

Power 75bhp at 5500rpm

Torque 82 lb ft at 3400rpm

Valves single (belt-driven) overhead camshaft actuating two valves per cylinder via rockers

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point petrol injection integrated with distributorless ignition. 54-litre fuel tank, with low-level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual; front-wheel drive (automatic option on 1.8 only)

Mph per 1000rpm 20.6 in 5th, 16.2 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs and lower arms.

Rear: independent, trailing arms and transverse torsion bars. Telescopic dampers and anti-roll bars front and rear

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance; 3.2 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 10.7m between kerbs, with 17.1m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5½ steel with 185/65R14 86T tyres (Michelin MXT Energy on test car); full-size spare

Brakes solid discs front, drums rear, with vacuum servo. Electronic anti-lock control optional on all models

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience (the more black blobs the better)

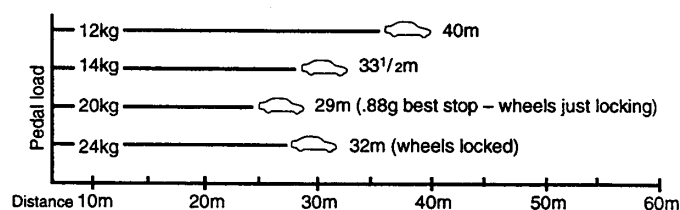
Seatbelts	front ●●●○○	rear ●●●○○	Door locking	●●●○○
			central locking?	☒
Head restraints	front ●●●○○	rear ☒	remote control?	☒
			auto window closure?	☒
			deadlocks?	☒
Interior				
safety padding	●●●○○			
driver's airbag?	☒		Luggage	
other airbags?	☒		secure from interior/hidden from view	●●○○○
† safety pack (passenger's and front side airbags – option on all models)				
side impact protection	●●●○○		Alarm	☒
Fuel anti-spillage	●●●○○		engine immobilised?	☒
☒ standard on test car	☒ factory fitted option	☒ not available		

BRAKES

Pedal feel ●●○○○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●○○○ Handbrake ●●○○○

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (without ABS)

(A good-to-average best stop is about 28m at 20-30kg pedal load)

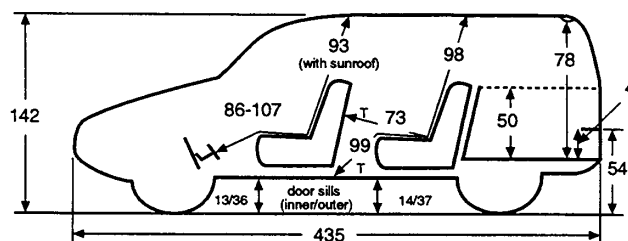


Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop: 16kg at start of test, 16kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

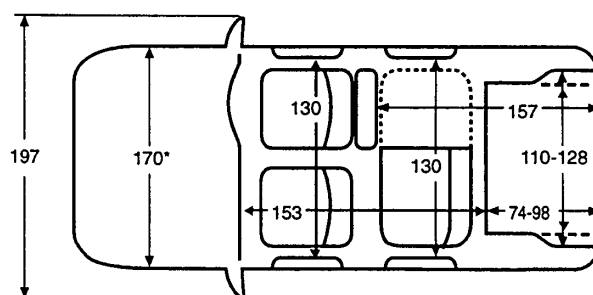
MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

Five-door estate



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



* 178 with mirrors folded

restraints, posher trim and a driver's seat height adjuster. This "option-that-shouldn't-be" adds £350 to the price.

The 1.4's modest but manly 75bhp isn't an overabundance to propel such a roomy load-lugger. But thanks to well-chosen (not overly high) gearing and minimal additional kerb weight (50kg), the 1.4 estate isn't too tardy on its toes. As our rivals table shows, the estate's 14sec 30-70mph trot is beaten for outright pace by all but the weightier, though similarly powered Mark 3 Golf estate – even by the significantly bulkier (though a little brawnier) Renault Megane Scenic.

The picture is less one-sided with the gear lever left alone, however, when the 1.4's blend of modest gearing and eager-beaver mid-range enthusiasm delivers reasonably peppy progress. Cruising is quite civilised, too, although the 1.4 can sound busy on motorways. With a good driving position (easily tailored by reach- and rake-adjustable steering, which partly offsets the lack of seat-height adjustment), power steering, slick controls and an affable nature, the 1.4 estate is an easy and reasonably enjoyable car to conduct. To its credit it doesn't feel as under-engined as its ample size and modest power output might suggest.

A big car with a little engine is usually a recipe for poor fuel economy. Creditably, though, the 1.4 proved pleasantly thrifty in our hands, stretching 38 miles from each gallon in a mixture of use. More impressively, we saw a comfortable and diesel-like 53mpg on a sedate 100-mile jaunt, while the good-sized tank (and a less alarmist fuel gauge/low-level warning lamp than we experienced on the 1.8) allows over 400 miles between top-ups.

Riding on slightly wider 185/65 tyres than its five-door counterpart, the estate loses little of the hatchback's polished poise over the bumpy bits. As on the hatch, though, the steering isn't so rewarding,

providing little real feel of what the front tyres are up to, while the straight ahead "woolliness" we criticised on the 1.8 is present to a similar degree on the lower-powered estate. The disc/drum brakes feel well up to their task in normal use but, unsurprisingly, failed to match our 1.8 test car's optional anti-lock set-up in panic, all-out stops.

The cheapest estate (the 1.4X) currently chimes in at around the £12,500 mark, but loses out on some desirable conveniences, making the £700-dearer LX better value in our book. This premium – similar to what the estate costs over a hatchback – brings you a (big) electric sunroof and powered front windows, front foglamps, handy remote control for the central locking, plus a rev counter, a lockable lower glovebox and an extra pair of speakers, but that split-folding back seat and an alarm still cost extra. Insurance-wise, the 1.4 attracts a fairly modest group 6 rating, four groups lower than for the top-of-the-shop 1.8 16v version.

VERDICT

Stylish and spacious, if not especially swift, Citroën's small estate car with a big appetite brings much-boosted versatility to the Xsara line-up. With (arguably) more pleasing looks than the hatch, a fine ride, good fuel economy and a load bay to teach a few larger estates a trick or two, the Xsara estate holds plenty of appeal for big families on a not-so-big budget. Indeed, it doesn't just compete well in its own class, it provides a very capable and cheaper alternative to some larger estates, too.

Conventional estates like the Peugeot 306, new Astra and forthcoming Golf provide ample direct competition, but don't forget we'll have a rash of mega-versatile mini-MPVs (like the Megane Scenic) coming along soon, as well. In the meantime, though, have no hesitation in including the Xsara on your shortlist.

HOW THE XSARA COMPARES*

	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (m/kg)	Maximum legroom – front (cm)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (cm)	Steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
CITROËN XSARA 1.4	1360/75	3400	14.0	31.9/22.1	38	29/20	107	99/73	3.3/10.7	435
Ford Escort 1.6	1597/87	3075	12.3	34.4/23.0	35	26½/27*	107	97/69	3.0/10.4	427
Peugeot 306 1.6	1587/87	3350	11.6	27.0/18.7	38	30/17	104	94/67	3.3/10.9	434
Renault Megane Scenic	1598/90	3450	13.7	28.4/21.0	34	29/30*	105	102/76	3.5/10.5	414
VW Golf 1.8 (Mark 3)	1781/75	2925	14.9	31.6/24.5	37	28/17	109	99/69	3.2/10.2	434
*all 5-door estates						*with ABS			(p) all power-assisted	