

Citroën Xsara Estate

Featured model: 1.6 16v LX



WE FIRST TESTED THE XSARA three years ago in "Exclusive" 1.8-litre, top-of-the-range guise, with an asking price then of about £15,000.

Now, despite a reduction of 200cc, the "new look" Xsara 1.6LX produces similar power and performance (using 11 per cent less fuel) and has most of the Exclusive's goodies (and a few more besides), yet is currently £5000 cheaper.

Just as important in the longer term are the improved warranty and mid-term changes which enhance safety and potential reliability. Multiplex wiring (a sort of "ring main" for cars), the adoption of adaptable-inflation twin airbags and ABS as standard are impressive – several more-expensive rivals provide them as extra-cost options.

Multiplex also provides headlamps that stay on for a minute after you've arrived home, wipers that change sweep frequency with road speed, and a radio that varies its volume in the same way.

The estate car comes with a back seat (velour trimmed, with neat carpet everywhere in the load area) that's the equal in comfort and space to the hatchback's and folds deftly to produce a flat L-shaped load platform for three occupants.

There's no load sill to speak of, useful illumination and tie-down facilities are provided, and its luggage volume is better than most because of generous load height, even below the window line. In general, it's better as a four seater than

Golf or Astra and only the Focus accommodates more – by the odd two or three centimetres. The one deficient dimension is load length through to the front seatback.

Rear kneeroom is enhanced by the deeply scooped-out front seatbacks – but a prominent lower padded roll does no favours to leg-stretching space.

We usually spend the first day or so in Peugeots and Citroëns wriggling and adjusting this and that, to get comfortable at the wheel. We always finish up feeling at home, though, except for a lack of lumbar support in this case.

The revised steering is less woolly, but weightier at normal road speeds – a vain attempt to imbue the car with "road feel"; it doesn't because the weight is still there when the front wheels lose their grip. You feel well located in the seat at such times and, with its 55-Series Michelins, the Xsara handles better than ever, without spoiling its impressively absorbent ride – which is still better than most.

VERDICT

The latest revisions make this underrated rival to Astra and Focus more desirable, more reassuring – and even better value in LX guise. The estate car is so civilized (you get all its extra space without any compromise) except that it needs a longer parking slot.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

SPECIFICATION

engine 1587cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 110bhp at 5750rpm, 110 lb ft at 4000rpm; belt-driven twin overhead camshafts, 16 valves
transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 21.7mph/1000rpm in 5th, 17.1 in 4th
suspension front: independent damper/struts with integral coil springs. Rear: independent trailing arms and transverse torsion bars
steering hydraulic power assistance; 3.2 turns lock-to-lock; 10.75m diameter turning circle between kerbs (17.3m for one turn of the wheel)
brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear, with vacuum servo and anti-skid control (ABS) standard on all versions
wheels/tyres 5½in steel with 195/55R15H tyres (Michelin Primacy on test car); full-size spare

LIKES ...

lots of courtesy lighting
 clever boxes, straps, eyes for stowage
 gas-strut bonnet opening
 access to spare without luggage removal
... and GRIPES
 h-brake/g-lever too close in reverse
 seat height lever can prod your bottom
 key-handset rather bulky
 low-fuel warning lamp is alarmist
 main beam warning lamp is obscure

THE XSARA RANGE

size and type lower medium (budget priced) 5-door hatch and estate, 3-door coupé
trim levels L, LX, SX, VTR, VTS
engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.4 litre/75bhp; 4/1.6/110, 4/2.0/137, 4/2.0/167
 diesel: 4/1.9/71, 4/2.0/90 (di turbo)
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (4-speed stepped automatic with torque converter available on 1.6 only)

OVERTAKING ABILITY				★★★★★○	
<i>Like previous 1.8, this latest 1.6 is a smooth and lively performer – a cut above average. No unpleasant noises either, and smooth down to 1400rpm</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	Poor weather prevented accurate assessment, but, 30-70mph times given below won't be far adrift				
30-50mph					
40-60mph					
50-70mph					
30-70mph	10.0	17.0	25.0		
max speed in each gear (*using 6000rpm)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	29	55	78	102½	122
– maker's figure					

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY			★★★★○		
As conventional estate cars go, this is pipped only by Focus for cargo and passenger space. Better seat folding than Ford; lots of oddments spots, too					
in centimetres (5-door estate)		inside		(†with sunroof)	
outside		front	- legroom	86-109	
length	437		- headroom	90-95 †	
width - inc mirrors	197	rear	- typical leg/	97/	
- mirrors folded	178		kneeroom	72	
height (no roof bars)	142		- headroom	96	
load sill height	4/55		- hiproom	129-130	
(inside/outside)		load space (all seats in use)			
steering		(litres/cu ft)		555/196	
turns lock-to-lock	3.2	load length		91-152	
turning circle (metres)	10.7	full length to fascia		No	
easy to park/garage?		load width		114-127	
	★★★★○○	load height (to shelf/		51/	
		to top of aperture)		79	
† 94-97 without sunroof					

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★★★○	
<i>Adjustments for wheel reach and rake, and seat height, too. Deft gearshift and sensible left footrest. Info display shows oil level, ambient temperature, etc. An extra 12v socket up front</i>	
	

HOW THE XSARA ESTATE 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)
CITROËN XSARA 1.6 16v		4/1587/110	3220	10.0 ^(A)	25/17 ^(A)	40	25/23*	109	97/72	3.2/10.7	437
Ford Focus 1.6		4/1596/100	3150	10.8	29.1/20.1	40½	26½/15*	107	100/71	2.9/10.6	444
Vauxhall Astra 1.6 16v		4/1598/100	3440	11.2	23.6/16.3	41½	26/21	108	95/70	3.1/10.4	429
Peugeot 306 1.6		4/1587/87	3350	11.6	27.0/18.7	38	31/14	104	94/67	3.3/10.9	434
VW Golf 1.6		4/1595/100	3540	10.8	23.3/17.3	35	27½/18*	109	96/72	3.1/10.3	440
Citroën Berlingo Multispace 1.8		4/1761/90	3070	12.4	28.1/20.7	33	29/18	107	102/79	3.3/11.1	411
		^(A) approximate figures					* with ABS				

SAFETY ★★★★★○	
<i>Generous standard safety features plus good security at LX level. Brakes have electronic front/rear apportionment (EBD) and produce powerful panic arrest without drama</i>	
braking	
pedal feel	★★★★○○
in emergency	★★★★○○
handbrake	★★○○○○
dry road stopping distance <i>from 50mph (with standard ABS)</i>	
pedal load	distance
10kg	40m
16kg	28m
23kg	25m (ABS on)

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS (5 door tested 1998)	
front impact	NA%
overall	NA% ★★★★★○
pedestrian rating	NA%
side impact	★★○○○○

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

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★★★○	
<i>Steering on the weighty side, but poised cornering with less roll than with old ZX. Estate not as easy to reverse as some rivals</i>	
	
COMFORT ★★★★★○	
<i>SX's lumbar adjusters look attractive, but noise control, ride comfort and automatic air conditioning all pamper front occupants</i>	

FUEL ECONOMY ★★★★★○	
<i>More than respectable at this performance level, especially good in warm-up period. Generous range undermined by alarmist low-level lamp</i>	
type of use <i>(air conditioning off)</i>	AA test (mpg)
urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	26
suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	34
motorway (70mph cruising)	39½
cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	40
rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	46½
typical mpg overall	40
realistic tank capacity/range	45 litres/400 miles
official mpg (urban/extra urban/combined)	30.4/51.4/40.9
CO ₂ emissions 160g/km	car tax band B