

Peugeot 206

Featuring 1.4 LX 5-door



THE 206 ISN'T A NEW DEPARTURE, BUT A return to an already successful, tried and tested formula. When the smaller 106 tried to replace the old 205, its bid was less than successful. Perhaps it was the 205's ageless lines or the fact that it was just that bit larger than most in its time – whatever the reason, it wouldn't lie down.

Apart from new styling, the 206 almost slavishly follows in the footsteps of its predecessor. That's fine as far as it goes, but you quickly realise that it's therefore no trendsetter. The smaller power units, suspension, even accommodation, are all very similar to the 205's, although the new model is a little longer. However, there's a new high-efficiency, direct-injection 90bhp diesel in the offing, and in matters of safety and environmental concerns, it features significant improvements from launch. The mid-range mainstay of the UK, the 1.4LX, is the one we test here.

It's curious how manufacturers use different engine sizes to produce the same power output (as our rivals table shows). This 1.4 isn't the smoothest at tickover or when threading through traffic below 1500rpm (that's under 25mph in fourth), but it pulls lustily and at

higher-speed cruising, manages to avoid nasty "noises off"; our fifth gear whined prominently in the 40-50mph band, however.

A really slick gearchange, a 9kg clutch (with a footrest alongside), and an equally progressive, well-weighted accelerator pedal make the 206 feel willing and able in the cut and thrust of traffic. However, the driving position places the wheel rather high and at a fair stretch when you're right for the pedals, while a little more lumbar support wouldn't go amiss, either.

In overtaking ability, this 1.4 more or less equates with a 1.25 Fiesta (if both are fitted with air-conditioning that's switched off), and the 205's mpg figures are at least as good. Its larger-than-usual fuel tank gives an excellent range, by the way.

As with the comparison of the two power units, the 206 suspension's cornering prowess is just as capable as the Ford's, but it lacks that ultimate zest, finesse – whatever the word is to describe the difference. The steering runs true, but is a shade lifeless and uninformative, although pleasingly quick to respond, with well-curtailed roll and nose-drift.

There's a surprising amount of thumping disturbance over broken surfaces (even though our car was on

Continued on page 3

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

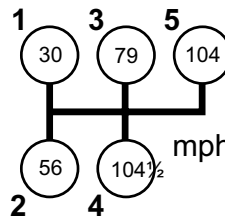
mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS					
		2.3	4.8	8.4	12.7
IN 5TH GEAR					
		6.9	14.1	21.3	30.3
IN 4TH GEAR					
		4.7	9.3	14.4	20.2

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES					
		13.6/9.4		14.4/9.7	
			14.1/9.3		16.2/10.9

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
		6250*		6300	4950

* for best acceleration



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Type of use - with air conditioning off*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	29
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	37
Motorway (70mph cruising)	41½
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	44½
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	50
Typical mpg overall	43

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

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type transverse four cylinder in line; all-alloy construction with five main bearings

Size 75 x 77mm = 1360cc

Power 75bhp at 5500rpm

Torque 83 lb ft at 3400rpm

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

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point petrol injection with integrated spark timing via direct ignition (no plug leads). Three-way catalyser and 50-litre tank, with low level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual, front-wheel drive (auto optional extra)

Mph per 1000rpm 21.0 in 5th
16.5 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent strut-type with integral coil springs. Rear: independent trailing arms, with transverse torsion bars. Anti-roll bars and gas-filled telescopic dampers all round

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance; 3.3 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 10.1m between kerbs, with 16.7m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5½in steel with 175/65R14T tyres (Michelin Energy on test car). "Space-saver" temporary spare

Brakes discs front, drums rear with vacuum servo; optional electronic anti-lock control fitted to test car

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

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

Seatbelts

front ●●●●○ rear ●●●●○

Door locking

central locking? ☒

remote control? ☒

auto window closure? ☒

dead locks? ☒

Head restraints

front ●●○○○ rear ☒

Interior

safety padding ●●●●○

driver's airbag? ☒

other airbags? ☐

side impact protection ●●●●○

Luggage

secure from interior/hidden from view ●●○○○

Alarm

engine immobilised? ☒

Fuel anti-spillage

●●●●○

☒ standard on test car ☐ factory fitted option ☒ not available

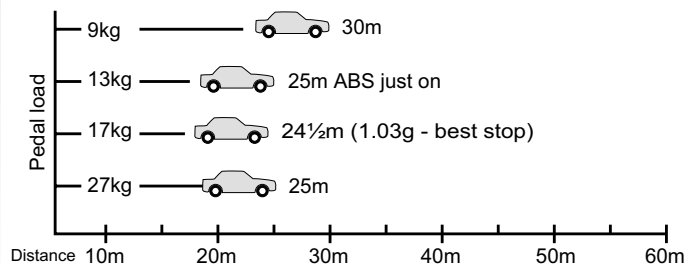
Euro NCAP crash test results - not available

BRAKES

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

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with ABS)

(A good-to-average best stop is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal load)

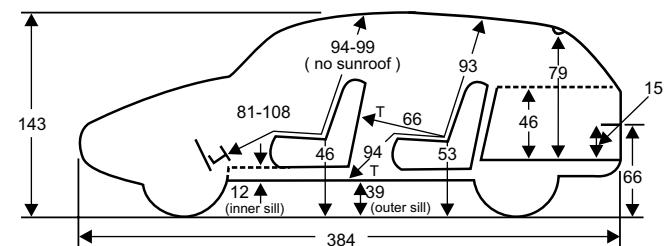


Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g stop):

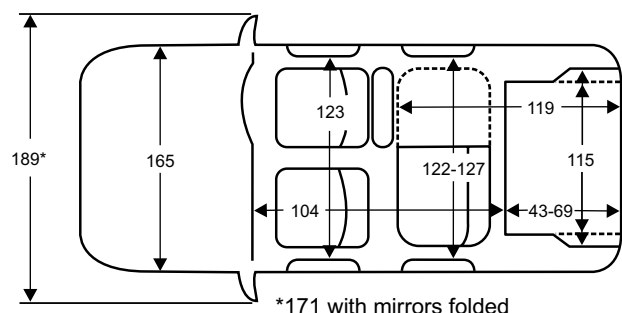
8kg at start of test, 10kg at end of test (Ideal brakes show no change)

MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres



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



Michelins, which are good in that sort of situation). Again, the ride is very competent, but lacks the supreme suppleness of say, the old Citroën ZX.

All round vision is good at the helm, with intermittent wipe at front and rear with separate wash/wipe functions, as well – all under stalk control. Likewise, the rear foglamp is switched on (and off again!) with the main lighting stalk, and the competent RDS radio/cassette again has a satellite stalk control. The front wipers' complicated linkage doesn't prevent a troublesome unswept area towards the top of the driver's screen pillar (bothering taller drivers in particular), and the visors don't mask the outer corners, either.

The heater can produce cooler air at face level only at lower heat settings – and then the screen can easily start to mist up; the solution is to use the air con, even in winter. Our car was so fitted, which means it had no sunroof; you can have a simple tilting sunroof instead for the same price, but in view of the demister's limitations, we would favour the air conditioning option.

The interior is competent and convenient, with useful details such as the special folding front passenger seat, designed to help accommodate oddments and long items. However, the facia is hard plastic and some of the trim details seem fragile, with painted metal on view inside, as well as being unprotected on the door sills. These get filthy in wet weather and protrude enough to guarantee dirty trouser legs.

The back seat of the five door is a bit higher than most, so it's reasonably easy for passengers to get out; legroom is only fair and kneeroom worse. The usual split/fold arrangements are fairly simple to achieve and you can stow the load cover on board without trouble.

A remote-control handset (as well as keyholes on both front doors) ensures easy access – *too* easy at times, because you can operate the button unwittingly; the tailgate is unlocked with the other four doors – convenient. If any door is left ajar, a helpful buzzer sounds and the roof lamp winks.

Safety and security reflect the latest thinking, with pyrotechnic front seatbelt tensioners that also "give" a bit as chest loads build up; a passenger's airbag and side airbags are on the options list.

Accident avoidance will definitely be helped by specifying the ABS (low-cost) option. The brakes are extremely powerful, but too fiercely servoed without this feature; there's some heat fade but recovery is quick.

VERDICT

Maybe we were expecting too much, but our satisfaction with the new 206 was tinged with disappointment that it fails to surpass the various qualities of established rivals.

It's not as poised and "involving" as a Fiesta, less soft and cosy than the latest Clio and, although having more interior room than a 106, there's still significantly less than in a Punto or Corsa. We were also aware of bits that might break or get scratched – plus individual faults on our test car – build quality needs to soak in deeper.

Yet it's neat and nimble, reasonably priced and is a welcome gap-filler between the 106 and 306.

What the 206 needs is something special, something unique, that sets it apart from its counterparts; that need could well be met by the new diesel – watch this space...

LIKES AND GRIPES

Good all-round vision with handy wash/wipe	...	but wipers and visors miss screen upper corners
Easier to use immobiliser in key (not numeric pad)	...	but it's hard to find ignition keyhole
Low cost (£300) ABS option	...	but 3-year warranty costs £400 extra
Useful stowage below front passenger's cushion	...	but poor security in boot area
Excellent handbook	...	Space-saver spare wheel only

HOW THE 206 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)
PEUGEOT 206 1.4LX	1360/75	3330	12.7	30.3/20.2	43	25/13*	108	94/66	3.3/10.1	384
Ford Fiesta 1.25LX	1242/75	3640	12.4	28.1/18.5	42	28/16	108	92/66	2.9/10.1	383
Fiat Punto 85ELX	1242/86	3620	11.7	29.7/20.2	41	27½/20	105	102/71	2.9/10.2	376
Skoda Felicia 1.6SLXi	1598/75	3150	12.4	25.2/17.1	39½	25/22*	106	99/74	3.1/10.85	388
Rover 214i	1396/75	3620	13.6	29.3/19.8	39½	28/16	107	94/66	3.4/10.4	397
Citroën Saxo 1.4SX	1360/75	3180	11.5	27.0/18.6	46½	29/27	105	91/65	3.1/10.5	372
Renault Clio 1.4RT	1390/75	3560	12.3	27.0/17.8	40	27½/18*	105	93/66	3.4/10.4	377
						* with ABS	(p) all power assisted			