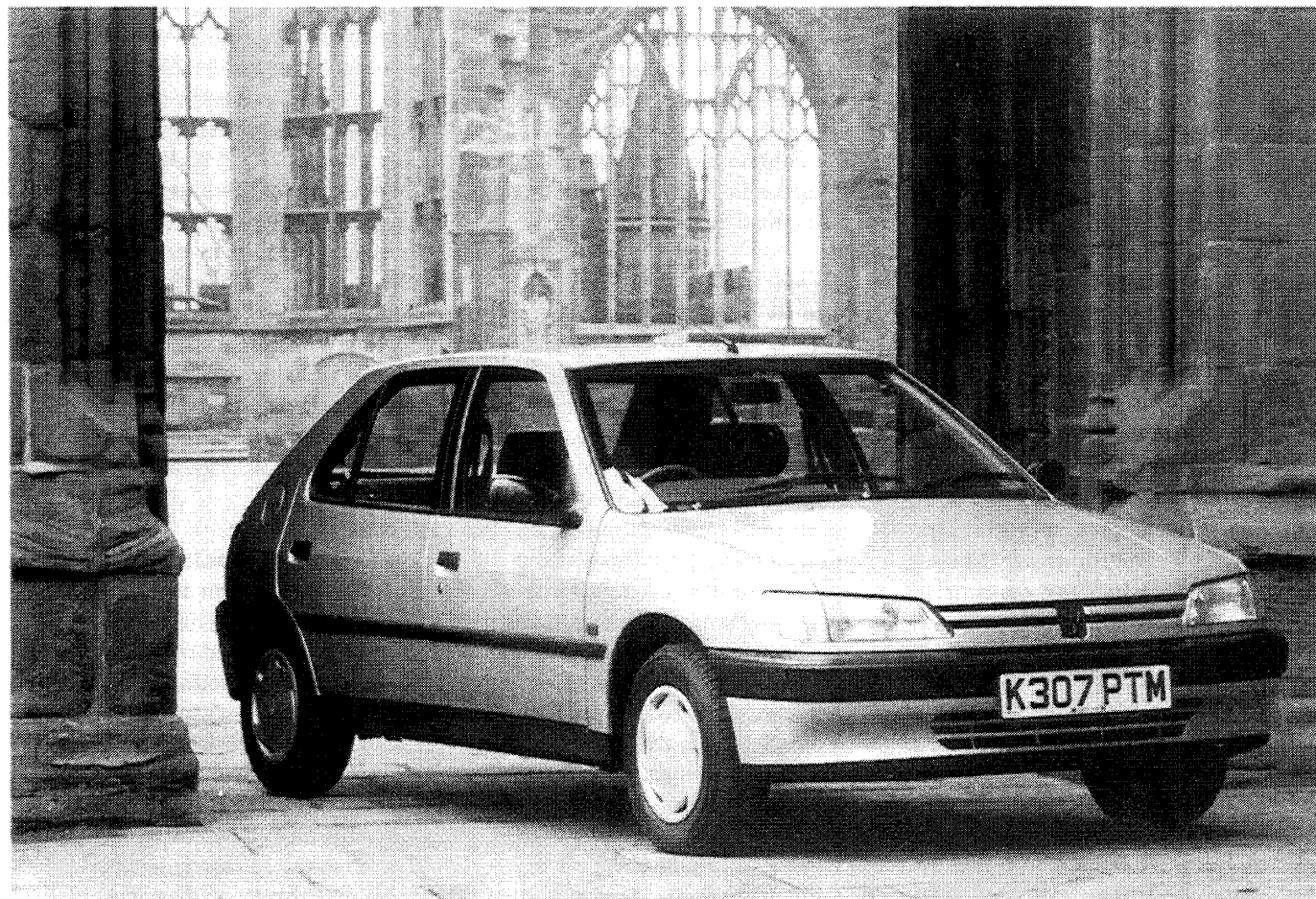


October 1993

Peugeot 306

Featuring 1.6XL



THE PEUGEOT 205'S POPULARITY HAS almost been an embarrassment. The little 106 is meant to replace it but just like the old 309, this newcomer is struggling to capture the limelight from its ever-popular older sibling.

The 309 was always a better car than its reputation – the 130bhp GTi in particular was a fine driving machine and the ordinary 1.6GL offered a lot of performance and comfort, too, at its keener price lower down the market.

It should be no surprise, therefore, to discover that its replacement looks like an inflated 205, but is designated 306. In fact, it's 2¹/₄in shorter yet 300 lb heavier than its predecessor, in the 1.6-litre XL volume-selling guise in which we tested it. There's nothing more powerful than 1.8/102bhp at present and the lower range versions all have Citroën ZX counterparts (both petrol and diesel) except for this 1.6. It's an enlarged version of the ZX's 1.4-litre unit – entirely different from the old 309's 1.6.

Results are pleasing if you compare it with a ZX 1.4 – economy is similar but acceleration is enlivened; 309 owners, on the other hand, will note a 5 per cent improvement in mpg but a second or so added to the 30–70mph time through the gears.

The XL trim is one up from the bottom and yet again in a Peugeot we felt that it came over as workmanlike rather than plush. Peugeot doesn't share Rover's knack of dressing up to allure – inside their cars, at least.

Go for a drive, however, and the smooth ride, reasonably supportive seats and well-controlled noise, all infuse a touch of class. Interior room is hardly improved over the 309; the ZX gives more back seat space than either, although only the Reflex version can match this 306's seat-folding versatility when serious load-carrying is more of a priority. Its 60/40 split cushion and backrest are standard on the L version upwards, with a sensibly shaped if slippery luggage deck behind.

Living with the 306 . . .

The driving seat and layout of major controls are good, but some of the controls are heavier than we expect nowadays. Ventilation is lacking with the heater in use, so the sunroof option is worth considering, as is power steering.

The 1.6XL's keen pricing makes us more tolerant of its minor trim and equipment shortcomings. For the same money, the Citroën ZX Avantage offers more creature comforts, but less power and, arguably, less sophisticated injury and anti-theft measures. However, there's a good in-car entertainment system (with a column stalk control) and remote-control central locking.

Apart from some unwelcome warranty restrictions that tie the owner to dealer servicing, the 306's underbonnet access, service schedule and parts prices all look reassuring, with an excellent Group 5 insurance rating, too.

This 306XL in 1.6-litre guise looks a shrewd buy because most rivals of equivalent power and performance cost more. We enjoyed its zippy acceleration, but have to confess to driver disappointment in some respects. The ZX, like the old 205 in its heyday, has that vital extra something that makes its road manners memorable rather than merely competent.

At the Wheel

Driving position

This is a real improvement over the 309, with good interrelationship between pedals, seat and steering wheel, the last offering rake adjustment even on basic models. There's a useful left footrest, too, but the other foot is slightly cramped against the underside of the fascia. A bit more lumbar support wouldn't go amiss – this is provided with an adjuster on the top-trim XT only.

Controls and displays

The clutch, gears and (manual) steering all require rather more effort than on some counterparts, and some tell-tale lamps are obscure within their push-button switches. The instruments are plain but functional and quite accurate, too, the speedometer reading just 2–2½mph fast between 30 and 70. The use of a radio control stalk on the column is a great help, partly because the main set is cluttered with small buttons.

Vision

The 306 is much easier to reverse than most cars these days, and has sensible fold-flat outside mirrors with interior adjusters. Unlike the ZX, it also has decent wiper sweeps, although only the rear one possesses that well-aimed washer spray that emerges along the length of the blade – pity. There's no panel light rheostat and no interior headlamp beam trimmers; these are reached by raising the bonnet. At times, the absence of a rear roof lamp and rear door switches leaves the back seat passengers groping for personal effects, although front occupants have no complaints.

Driver satisfaction

Perhaps the power steering option would raise our enthusiasm, but we found that this 306's admittedly stable handling was undermined by the general weightiness of response when pressed into a turn; the slippery wheel rim doesn't help, either. The engine's raucous note when extended is acceptable because it subsides when cruising. Nevertheless, you're always aware that it's working busily on a motorway, by the background hum and standard tachometer.

It certainly delivers lively overtaking ability, thanks to its low gearing, and it purrs contentedly to remarkably low speeds in top. Only the occasional hiccup in determined low-speed pullaways undermined our car's otherwise foolproof multi-point injection. It started well, hot or cold, in a

fashion that earlier carburettored Peugeots found difficult.

Space & Comfort

Seating and ride comfort

Perhaps it's not quite as unflurried over poor roads as the ZX, but the 306 still handles bumps with a composure that betters most rivals. Just a hint of lateral body "waddle" over certain undulations points to almost too much anti-roll characteristics built into the suspension. The Citroën displays an unflappable languor in such conditions, with a healthy willingness to tilt a bit more on corners as a result.

The seats are more ordinary in their support and space, although they can't seriously be faulted.

Getting in and out

No serious problems here, either, apart from the gloom at night in the back. The centre tunnel doesn't intrude seriously and we like the door pull cum armrests. There's no centre armrest, however, neither are there any door sill protectors to guard against clumsy shoes.

Luggage and oddments storage

The unprotected rear load sill is more intrusive than we expected and it's difficult to manhandle the tailgate because there's nothing to get hold of on the outside. There's a practical, evenly shaped load deck, but height beneath the load cover is limited and silly radio speakers mounted integrally mean that there's even less height beneath them. There's also a stiff cable connector to unfasten if you want to carry bulkier items (with the loss of the rear speakers).

We approve of the 60/40 split cushion and backrests, and the way that the seats fold in proper estate-car fashion to give a flat deck as well as front occupant protection against sliding luggage, but it's a pity the floor is so slippery and vulnerable to scuffing.

The front oddments spaces include a pair of lined and lidded

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Peugeot 306 1.6XL (5 door)

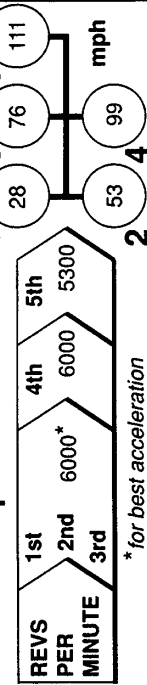
PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph 3.8	0-60mph 11.6	1/4 mile 18.5		
THROUGH THE GEARS	30	40	50	60	70
	2.2	4.5	7.8	11.6	
IN 5TH GEAR	30	40	50	60	70
	6.5	13.2	20.1	27.0	
IN 4TH GEAR	30	40	50	60	70
	4.6	9.1	13.5	18.7	

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
	13.3/9.4	13.6/8.9			
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES	30	40	50	60	70
	13.2/9.1	13.8/9.6			

Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION

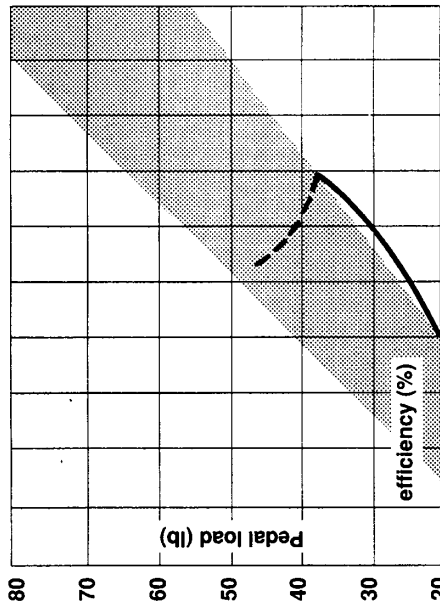
Fuel grade for tests: unleaded Premium, 95 octane

Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	29 1/2
Short journeys in the suburbs	31
Motorway - 70mph cruising	37 1/2
Brisk driving, mixed roads	39
Gentle driving, rural roads	44 1/2
Typical mpg overall	38
Realistic tank range*	54 litres/450 miles

* based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes (without ABS) How pedal loads affect braking



Braking efficiency shown as a percentage of gravity (ie 100% = 1.0g). Ideally the braking curve should be a gentle sweep and lie within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light - although this is more acceptable on cars with ABS. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

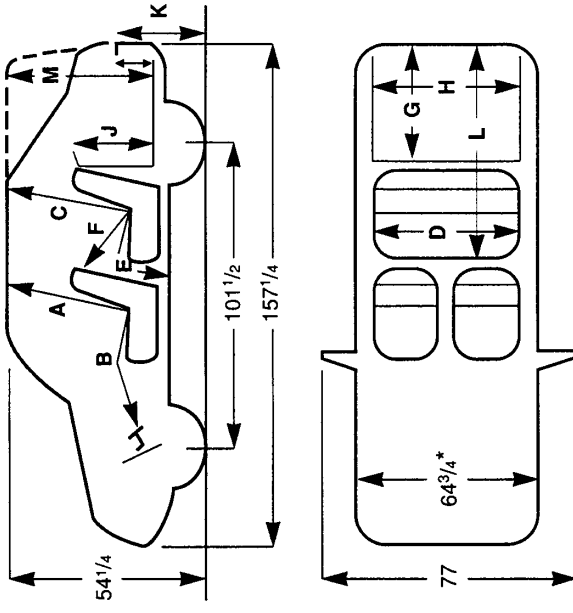
50-0mph best stop	84% / 100ft
Handbrake only	35
Fade test How hard use affects braking (Ideal brakes show no change)	
Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)	29
At start of test	29
After constant use	29
After severe use	29

Safety check list

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

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



* with mirrors folded

Inside (inches)	Kerb weight in lb (full of fuel)
A Front headroom	2300
B Front legroom (min - max)	30 1/2
C Rear headroom	45 1/2-50
D Back seat width (between armrests)	17 1/4
E Typical rear * legroom	9/27 1/2
F Typical rear * kneeroom	55
G Load length	38 1/4
H Load floor width (min - max)	33 1/2-41 3/4
J Load height	35 1/4
K Sill height (inner/outer)	50 1/2
L Load length	38
M Load height (to tailgate hinge)	26

* "Typical" represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger's seat set at 41in

facia boxes (one lockable) plus unlined front door bins and console cubbies. Rear passengers have only the carpet-clad rear load cover to park things on.

Heating and ventilation

Although the rotary controls are much easier to work, they allow cool footwell draughts when set to screen or vent. The booster fan becomes noisy on anything except its slowest setting, too. The vents on the facia are OK in summer, but they turn warm too readily with the heater on, so promoting stuffiness. There's scant attention to the needs of rear passengers; in contrast to most Peugeots we have sampled, little warmth reaches the rear footwells. No pollen filter or recirculation facility is provided, although you can shut the whole thing off at short notice.

Trim and equipment

This version is expected to be the biggest seller and it certainly offers some useful items at its keen price – but they're more practical than pampering. No plush trim or toys like electric windows and mirrors to play with; instead you get height adjustable steering and seatbelts.

Safety

Accident avoidance

No cause for complaint here, except for an over-zealous brake servo that makes skid-free urgent stops too delicate an art. Fade resistance is better than before and the brakes are squeak-free, too.

Injury prevention

Does that second glovebox point to the provision of a passenger's airbag later? At present, there's no driver's bag on offer either, but

apart from this, the 306's sturdy, reinforced body offers most of the safety attributes now commonplace in family hatchbacks. The rear seatbelts have neat parking tags but no shoulder height adjusters and we would prefer more reinforcement in the front seatbacks; otherwise, the interior is inoffensive.

Security

All except the basic XN come with an alarm/immobiliser that's triggered by any door opening, as well as interior movement. The latter function can be disengaged by pressing a button on the steering column – when leaving a dog inside, for instance. All this is triggered by the remote control central locking. The tailgate can be locked independently if you prefer, although, incongruously, the back seat latches are inside the car. The fuel filler flap doesn't look as if it provides much deterrence, given a dark corner and a sturdy screwdriver. Its legitimate release is down by the driver's seat.

Money Matters

Value for money and depreciation

The 309 never held its value particularly well and discounting hasn't done the ZX much good, either. Reduced dealer margins on current Peugeots could stabilise the situation on the new 306. Time will tell whether you make your savings at the front end or the back end of the deal. Low insurance premiums are promised by the Group 5 rating, however; that's two lower than for an Escort!

Warranty and servicing

There's just 12 months' indemnity

for mechanical items, but a six-year anti-rot-through warranty against panel rust, and the latter no longer requires chargeable checks. You do have to stay with franchised-dealer servicing to keep both valid, however. Peugeot parts are keenly priced. They're cheaper than for a Rover or a Fiat, for example, and the 1.6 version's underbonnet accessibility is impressive by current standards.

Fuel economy

The 306 is just as frugal as a ZX 1.4 and better in the warm-up period, both in terms of its manners and its thirst, than the Citroën or the old 309. In a wider context, there aren't many rivals of equivalent performance that can better 38mpg overall. A magnificent real-life tank range is another asset, thanks to a sensible low-level lamp that should remain on permanently before you make a fuel stop. Refuelling is a little impeded by the narrow filler neck.

Durability

Reliability and rust prevention

Peugeots offer only average reliability, and minor faults on our UK-built sample included a door creak, a wind whistle on the opposite door, speedo noise and a renegade warning lamp. Its rust protection includes good lower sill and floor pan coatings of chip-resistant compounds, slim wing lips and mud-cheating contoured wheelarches. The plastic bumpers are partially painted, however, and the anti-rust "goo" on the floorpan doesn't extend to the rear suspension mounts rearwards – just primed metal is on view thereabouts.

HOW IT COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (in)	Steering turns/circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Peugeot 306 1.6XL (5 door)	1587/87	111	11.6	27.0/18.7	38	89/38	41 ³ / ₄	38/26	4.1/35	157 ¹ / ₄
Citroën ZX 1.4 Avantage† (5 door)	1360/75	102	13.4	32.2/21.3	38 ¹ / ₂	88/45	42	39 ³ / ₄ /27	4.2/34	160 ¹ / ₄
Ford Escort 1.6L (5 door)	1597/90	109	12.3	34.4/23.0	35	103/75	41 ³ / ₄	38 ³ / ₄ /28	3.0/34 (p)	161 ³ / ₄
Vauxhall Astra 1.4i LS (5 door)	1389/82	108	13.2	37.4/24.7	41	100/60	42 ¹ / ₄	39 ¹ / ₂ /28	4.1/32 ¹ / ₂	159 ¹ / ₂
Toyota Corolla 1.3XLi (5 door)	1332/87	107	12.7	29.9/23.1	39 ¹ / ₂	92/33	42	38/26 ¹ / ₂	3.3/33 ¹ / ₄ (p)	161 ¹ / ₄

† non-cat carburettored version

(p) power-assistance standard



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 78.5mm bore x 82.0mm stroke = 1587cc. Iron block and alloy head; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 9.6:1

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

Fuel system electronic multi-point fuel injection, three-way regulated catalyser with lambda sensor. 60-litre (13.2-gallon) tank, with low-level warning lamp. Fuel required: unleaded only, 96 octane minimum

Ignition system fully programmed electronic, integrated with fuel system via coil and distributor

Maximum power 87bhp at 5600rpm

Maximum torque 100 lb ft at 3000rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch diaphragm-spring, dry plate; cable operated. Pedal load/travel: 30 lb/5in

Gearbox 5-speed (all synchromesh) and reverse.

Ratios: first 3.42, second 1.81, third 1.28, fourth 0.98, top 0.77 and reverse 3.58:1

Final drive 4.06:1, to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm 21.0 in top, 16.5 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 3350 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts with coil springs and an anti-roll bar. Rear: independent by trailing arms, transverse torsion bars and an anti-roll bar. Dampers: telescopic all round

Steering unassisted rack and pinion with 4.1 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 35ft between kerbs, with 70¹/₂ft circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5¹/₂in steel with 175/70R13 82T tyres (Michelin MXT on test car)

Brakes solid discs front, drums rear with vacuum servo (two-channel ABS optional)