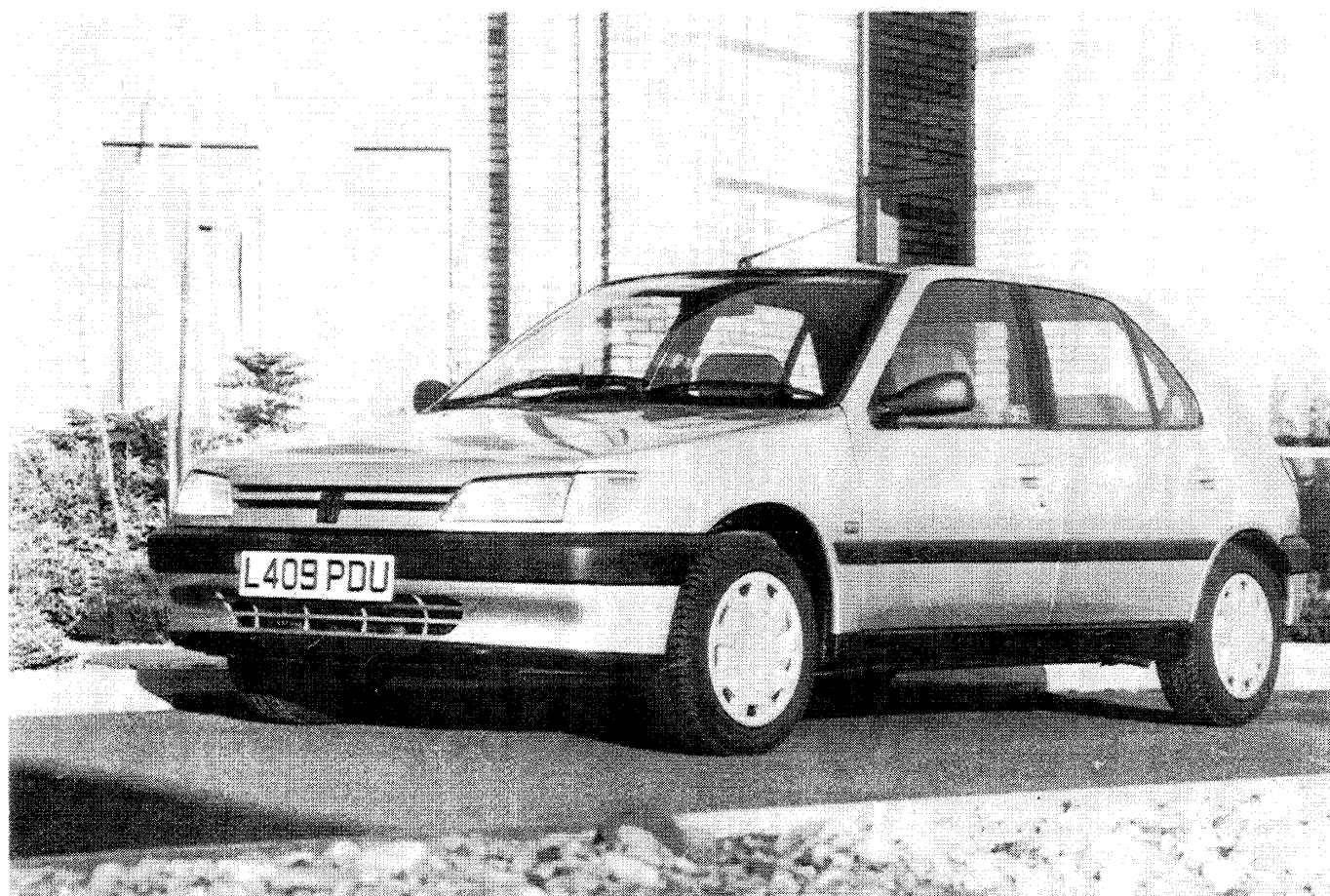


AA**Car test**

February 1994

Peugeot 306 1.9XRd Diesel

THIS DIESEL VERSION CAME TO US IN non-turbocharged guise, but with the higher grade XR trim as well as a sunroof and power steering (optional on L versions).

This makes it nearly £1200 more than our previous 1.6XL test car, although the diesel bit adds nothing to the list price. It does increase the model's front-end weight, though, thus making the power steering even more desirable.

Without the turbocharger, this 1.9-litre diesel produces 16bhp less than the 1.6 petrol version and, sure enough, ultimate acceleration is significantly slower. Diesels pull strongly from lower engine speeds, however, and our 30–70mph times in the gears are closer to those achieved in the 1.6. On the road, too, this translates into easy, unruffled progress from well below 30mph in fourth; 70mph cruising is also commendably quiet, although this 306 uses lower gearing than we are used to on diesels.

A recent test of the longer-legged, turbocharged

Citroën ZX version of this diesel, demonstrates that its all gains and no losses once you've found the extra £800 initial outlay. You'll be back to the 1.6 petrol version's overtaking times through the gears, exceed its liveliness in high gear pulling power and maintain the fuel economy of this non-turbo diesel – unless you indulge in the extra performance too much.

Diesels start easily and this model was no exception, apart from a tendency to stumble as it pulled away from rest for just the first few yards; smoke from the tailpipe was apparent, too. Thereafter, it behaved perfectly all day long. Such good manners provide a positive incentive to switch off in traffic queues – if only the radio didn't do the same. This Peugeot/Citroën diesel may not be the fastest or the most economical, but it's the quietest and the most mechanically refined oil-burner you can get at present, in or around this engine capacity.

OK, so there's some initial rattle from under the bonnet after a cold start, but this subsides promptly

and the quality or mid-range pitch of residual activity isn't offensive to the ear.

With its power steering, this diesel loses nothing to the petrol version in terms of ride comfort or cornering response. Indeed, the medium-weight effort at the helm makes it feel an ideal set-up, although some might prefer the turns from lock to lock to be reduced further, thus giving quicker reactions from the straight-ahead position.

A well-loaded interior can result in a trace of sogginess over bumps and crests – the ride is noticeably better when the passengers have all got out. However, there's no doubt that, with its ZX sibling, the 306 is about the best lower-medium saloon available for those who (like us) rate a smooth ride with satisfying cornering manners as very important. And it's nice to retain it in full measure on the diesel version.

Second sight

Our second look at the 306 confirms that it possesses a lot of fundamental virtues that are part of the basic design. However, there are also irritating flaws that should be rapidly eliminated to ensure that the novelty doesn't wear off.

We found the driving seat sorely lacking in lower spinal support, the ventilation deficient when the heater was on or in fummy traffic jams (there's no recirculation mode) and the rear compartment and load bay illumination woefully inadequate, even on the XR – why wire the tailgate lamp through the main lighting switch? The rear speakers fitted into the load cover are a pain and so is the absence of a tailgate grip when the rear end is covered in road spray. A timer that's been added to the heated rear window on 1994 versions is really an acknowledgement that you can't see that it's switched on.

The clutch becomes tiring to operate in slow-moving traffic, the mirrors are stiff to reset and the steering wheel rim is too slippery. We note that back seat headroom is better than in the ZX Advantage, but in other respects, the 306 doesn't treat rear passengers as well – there's not much cosiness back there.

Our car's other 1994 addition – deadlocks to supplement the alarm – proved to be a good thing, because we had to switch off the alarm when it decided to "cry wolf" on two occasions.

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph	4.9	0-60mph	16.6	1/4 mile	19.0
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mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.7	6.8	11.7	19.0
IN 5TH GEAR		7.4	14.6	23.4	33.7
IN 4TH GEAR		5.3	10.6	16.6	23.8

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES	15.1/10.5		16.0/11.3		
		14.6/10.6		19.1/13.2	

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	1	2	3	4	5
		4700*		4700*	4425	22	42	61	81	97
										mph

*for best acceleration

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: diesel

Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	36
Short journeys in the suburbs	42
Motorway – 70mph cruising	45
Brisk driving, mixed roads	47
Gentle driving, rural roads	58
Typical mpg overall	47 1/2
Realistic tank range*	53 litres/550 miles

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

VERDICT

With dynamic abilities that put most of the competition well and truly in the shade, the none-too-cheap 306 is nevertheless marred by some irritating habits. And with a close relative that's so winsome and such good value, can Peugeot afford to be complacent? As a diesel, the 306 is particularly accomplished and mannerly, offers respectable fuel economy, and has a remarkably cheap insurance group rating, as well. However, think seriously about paying the extra for the turbo-diesel – we reckon it's worth it for complete satisfaction.

HOW THEY COMPARE	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 1.9XRd	1905/71	97	19.0	33.7/23.8	47½	89/38	41¼	38/26	3.2/35 (p)	157¼
VW Golf 1.9LD	1896/64	95	19.0	35.3/26.3	49	99/45	42½	38/28	3.2/33½ (p)	158¼
Rover Maestro TD	1994/81	102	13.6	40.8/24.0	54	97/47	40¼	39½/27	3.5/34½ (p)	157½
Vauxhall Astra 1.7D	1700/59	93	18.6	44.5/28.8	52½	97/37	42¼	39½/27½	3.5/32½ (p)	159½
Peugeot 309 1.9GRD*	1905/65	96	18.0	27.2/21.2	48½	93/35	42	38½/28½	3.2/33½ (p)	159½
*old model, 1987 test									(p) power assisted	



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Same as for 1.6XL (see R9354) except for:

ENGINE

Type and size	83mm bore x 88mm stroke = 1905cc
Compression ratio	23.0:1
Valve gear	bucket tappets with shim adjusters
Fuel system	indirect injection diesel with mechanical rotary distributor-type pump. Fuel required: diesel. No intercooler or catalyser
Maximum power	71bhp at 4600rpm
Maximum torque	90 lb ft at 2000rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch	pedal load: 28 lb
Gearbox	ratios: first 3.45, second 1.85, third 1.28, fourth 0.97, top 0.76, and reverse 3.33:1
Final drive ratio	3.94:1
Mph per 1000rpm	22.0 in top, 17.2 in 4th
Rpm at 70mph	3200 in top gear

CHASSIS

Steering	power-assisted rack and pinion with 3.3 turns between full locks; 57½ft circle for one turn of the wheel
Tyres	175/65R14 82T (Michelin MXT fitted to test car)