

Citroën Xsara Picasso

Featured model: 1.8SX



AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

SPECIFICATION

engine 1749cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 117bhp at 5500rpm, 120 lb ft at 4000rpm; belt-driven twin overhead camshafts, 16 valves

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 21.8mph/1000rpm in 5th, 16.6 in 4th

suspension front: independent MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs. Rear: independent torsion bars, trailing arms. Anti-roll bars and telescopic dampers all round

steering hydraulic power assistance; 3.3 turns lock-to-lock; 11.9m diameter turning circle between kerbs

brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear with electronic anti-lock and brake-force distribution controls standard

wheels/tyres 6in steel with 185/65R15 88H tyres (Michelin XH1 on test car); full-size spare

LIKES ...

big load area/two-stage tailgate lift
3-point belts/headrests for all seats
cubby-holes, cupholders, hooks galore
clip-in, folding trolley in load bay

and GRIPES

no tacho/digital dials hard to read
"bay window" facia reflects in screen
seatback picnic trays feel flimsy
cramped pedal layout

THE XSARA PICASSO RANGE

body lower medium (mid-priced) MPV
trim levels LX and SX
engines petrol: 4-cylinder/1.6 litre/95bhp, 4/1.8/117bhp; diesel 4/2.0HDI/90bhp
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; no automatic option

THE PICASSO'S BACK-TO-FRONT, "push-me-pull-you" looks may lose Citroën's Scenic rival a few friends on the forecourt, but its blend of class-leading space, generous safety kit, creature comforts and keen pricing is proving a popular draw among the mid-sized MPV pack.

Strictly a five-seater (unlike the quirkily styled, six-seat Fiat Multipla, or Vauxhall's Zafira, which neatly shoehorns-in seating for up to seven), the Xsara-based Picasso has made significant inroads into the Scenic-class sales charts since its launch.

Having previously sampled the frugal, free-running 2.0HDI diesel, we turned our attention this time to the more powerful version of the 1.6- and 1.8-litre petrol-powered pairing.

The 117bhp 1.8-litre livens up the Picasso's get-up-and-go when driven with gusto, but it loses some mechanical refinement compared with the diesel when asked to do so. The "top-endy" power unit also feels more at home in a racy, pocket-sized hatchback like the Saxo than it does in the more sedate surroundings of an MPV.

The 1.8 also trails the diesel to a degree in on-the-road refinement, trading the oil-burner's composed deportment, especially over poorer surfaces, with fussier, slightly more fidgety progress over the lumpy bits.

The "musical chairs" interior benefits from the Picasso being a touch wider and longer than many in this class, with advantages in almost all areas, although

rear legroom looks merely average due to restricted foot space under the front seats.

Backing this up is a class-leading bounty of boot space. This isn't only regularly shaped with easy, low-silled access, but further enhanced by the two stage lifting tailgate and a handy, collapsible shopping trolley clipped neatly to the side of the load area.

All three back seats tip forwards, although only the centre one slides fore and aft. There's a plethora of oddments spaces, too, and helpfully, the uncluttered gap between the front seats considerably eases front-to-rear access.

Fuel economy can't match the diesel's thrift, of course, but the 1.8 still nets a very respectable 35mpg overall, with mid-40s easily attainable on gentle jaunts. On top of this, even the cheaper LX comes with a generous tally of equipment and safety kit, while the Picasso's roomy, comfortable cabin and general poise retain their appeal long beyond a brief showroom encounter.

VERDICT

To some, the Picasso isn't the prettiest of the mid-sized MPVs, but it delivers a more than generous mix of comfort, space and versatility at a keen price. For us, though, the petrol-powered 1.8 takes (a close) second place to the finer riding and more frugal diesel, despite the petrol version's livelier pace and still respectable economy.

OVERTAKING ABILITY ★★☆☆

Lively when revved, but more lethargic in higher gears; 1.8 unit feels more suited to GTI than MPV use. Gearshift slicker than its looks suggest, but cramped pedal layout mars driving appeal

acceleration in seconds	through gears*	3 rd gear	4 th gear	5 th gear	
20-40mph	3.4	6.3	8.9	13.5	
30-50mph	4.2	6.1	8.5	13.0	
40-60mph	5.2	6.1	8.6	13.7	
50-70mph	6.4	6.7	9.1	14.6	
30-70mph	10.6	12.8	17.6	27.6	
max speed in each gear (*using 6250rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④	⑤
speed (mph)	32	58	80	104	110

SAFETY ★★☆☆

Wealth of safety features (earning 4-star NCAP rating) includes ABS with EBD, quartet of front and side airbags, 3-point belts and head restraints for all in rear, plus a trio of Isofix child seat mounts

braking		dry road stopping distance	
pedal feel	★★★☆☆	from 50mph (with standard ABS)	
in emergency	★★★★☆	pedal load	distance
handbrake	★★★★☆	unhurried 10kg	44m
		sudden 18 kg +4kg ie 22kg	27½m best stop 28m ABS on

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS 1.6LX (lhd) tested 2001

front impact	69%	side impact	89%
overall	79% ★★☆☆	pedestrian rating	★★☆☆

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★☆☆

Roomy, comfortable five-seater, but foot space tight under front seats and only centre rear seat slides. Excellent rear shoulder room and luggage space, with plenty of storage and neat ideas

in centimetres (5-door MPV)		inside († without sunroof)	
outside		front - legroom	83-106
length	428	- headroom	96-102†
width - inc mirrors	198	rear - typical leg/	95/
- mirrors folded	181	kneeroom	72'
height (no roof bars)	164	- headroom	94
load sill height	2/60	- hiproom	137
(inside/outside)		load space (all seats in use)	
steering		(litres/cu ft)	550/19.5
turns lock-to-lock	3.3	load length	82-133
turning circle (metres)	11.9	(with rear seats removed)	155
easy to park/garage?	★★☆☆	load width	116-126
		load height (to shelf)	57
		(to top of aperture)	91-94

1 - 74 with picnic trays in use

SECURITY FEATURES

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



COMFORT ★★☆☆

Bags of Gallic poise and home-from-home comfort in the cabin, but upstaged by the HDi diesel's superior ride and refinement



FUEL ECONOMY ★★☆☆

Good pace allied to impressive thrift at the fuel pumps makes the Picasso one of the most efficient mid-sized MPVs, yet diesel version holds more appeal for ultimate mile-stretching economy

AA test results (mpg)		official figures (mpg)	
worst (hard/urban)	23½	urban	26.2
best (gentle/rural)	46	extra urban	47.9
overall mpg on test	35	combined	36.7
realistic tank capacity	49 litres	CO ₂ emissions	187g/km
typical range	380 miles	car tax band	D

HOW THE PICASSO 1.8 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 PICASSO 1.8i 5dr [5]	4/1749/117	3205	10.6	27.6/17.6	35	27½/18	106	95/72	3.3/11.9	428
Daewoo Tacuma 2.0CDX 5dr [5]	4/1998/119	3350	11.0	24.4/17.0	29	28½/20	103	103/77	3.0/10.4	435
Fiat Multipla 1.6i 5dr [6]	4/1581/103	3780	12.7	29.2/20.6	29	27½/20	106	114/83	2.8/11.1	399
Nissan Almera Tino 1.8i 5dr [5]	4/1769/114	3170	11.4	29.2/20.2	33	26½/10	108	98/71°	3.2/10.7	427
Renault Scenic 1.6i 5dr [5]	4/1598/110	3465	12.0	28.2/19.3	34½	26/40	108	102/76¹	3.5/10.6	417
Vauxhall Zafira 1.8i 5dr [7]	4/1796/113	3630	11.3	22.4/16.3	32	27/14	103	102/75	3.2/11.0	432

* max seating capacity in brackets †all with ABS ¹105/81 as 4-seater; ¹109/85 as 4-seater