

Citroën Grand C4 Picasso

Monday

First things first, and a train to Ashford International, where I met two colleagues: Neil and Tim. A mid-morning rendezvous was designed to give us plenty of time to reach the town of Breda in the Netherlands by late afternoon. The Picasso looked great from the outside; big, spacious and airy. Neil was doing the driving initially, and this gave me time to have a good look round the interior from my extremely comfortable position in the back. All this space... fantastic! I was definitely in club class.

I had already noted with satisfaction how the massive boot had swallowed all our luggage and equipment (we were off to record a little video, but more of that anon). Gazing forwards and upwards, I loved the amount of daylight streaming in, and the generally upmarket feel of the car. I was less keen on the large amounts of hard plastic up front (though I did love the pull-down table which allowed me to crack on with a bit of work as we headed into - and out of - the Channel Tunnel.

IN-CAR TECHNOLOGY

As you'd expect with a car at this price point, the in-car tech is extensive. More importantly, it's intuitive – and looks and sounds the part.

Smartphone mirroring is well-executed. We used Apple CarPlay via an iPhone for our test. Siri, the voice assistant found on Apple devices, was keen to help with a number of requests, including reading texts and playing music. Spotify works well via the car's screen, providing the soundtrack to our trip.

The 'native' Citroën system, also accessed through the Touch Drive interface, helped us get the most from our drive, including our navigation and the really clever active blind spot monitoring.

We used the car on a cross-channel trip and needed to switch between metric and imperial measurements. Features like this do feel a little tucked away but it was great to be able to switch the speed, fuel consumption and temperature units separately – helpful when we were on the continent, as one of our group had a penchant for dealing in 'old money' when it comes to the temperature.

There were two niggles. Firstly, the navigation system gave us a couple of questionable re-routes which lengthened the journey. Secondly, start-up time: when first switching the unit on, it seems like quite a while before you can use any of the functions. Plus, after the main start-up, some 'modules' still need more time to get ready...

two perhaps small, but frustrating-in-a-hurry, prices to pay for the otherwise excellent technology found in the car.

Neil Barrett

Neil in the front was happy, too. He had quickly mastered all the electronics and controls before handing the driving over to Tim once we were on the French side.

As we progressed (and later ground to a halt thanks to a senseless roadworks arrangement in Antwerp, with less than clear satnav direction attempting an alternative route), we agreed that this was a car that more than matched our need for space, practicality and comfort. OK, it would not perhaps win prizes for the most exciting drive, but it did exactly what we wanted it to do.

Tuesday

A chilly start to the day in our Breda hotel car park. From here we would have just a short transfer back to the motorway, where we needed to find Hazeldonk Service Area. We had covered more than 200 miles yesterday and were pleased to see the fuel gauge still showing we had well over half a tank left.

We met a large group of police officers at Hazeldonk, and set up a 'live' video broadcast which showcased their work in road safety - just two days before 'Project EDWARD', the European Day without a Road Death.

As soon as this event was over and done with, we needed to be back on the road for a similar broadcast in the afternoon from Clacket Lane Services on the M25 in Surrey. A long wait for some take-away breakfast did not help with timings, but we were eventually on our way, >>

Pics: Richard Sowersby





a week at the wheel

>> setting the satnav and hoping we would not experience a re-run of yesterday's gridlock in and around Antwerp.

We were in the top-spec Grand C4 Picasso, known as a Flair Blue HDi 150, with an automatic six-speed gearbox. Sure enough, there was a lovely line-up of kit, including an excellent electric tailgate, reversing camera, Park Assist self-parking system, fold-down aircraft-style tray tables, panoramic sunroof and 18-inch alloy wheels.

As this was my first session at the wheel, I was determined not to fall foul of the slightly strange gear and parking brake set-up. The 'EAT6' automatic transmission is worked by a thin stalk on the upper right hand side of the steering wheel. This took a bit of getting used to, but I don't think any of us got used to the parking brake button. It worked sometimes, and wouldn't work at other times. I could detect no pattern as to when.

The price tag for this model is just over the £30,000 mark. Below Flair is 'Feel' spec, with entry level known as 'Touch' and a price tag below £23,000.

Wednesday

By now I would be expecting to be used to most of the test car's idiosyncracies. Maybe I was having a particularly dense week, but I did find a few things starting to niggle. For example, the fuel gauge disappeared from the dashboard today, and didn't return until the weekend. Quite how it went - and how it suddenly reappeared - I have no idea, but for now my only way of checking how much fuel was available was by scrolling through the on-board computer to find the current range.

Having been impressed from the start by the futuristic and airy interior, I am afraid I did have a few gripes. I generally did not warm to having the dashboard and all the buttons on a large central console, with nothing available straight ahead



of me. Neil in the front passenger seat was more interested in enjoying the luxury of a fold-out foot rest - with a massager built in.

Thursday

I'm too hot. During an early morning drive to the airport, I try to reduce the cabin air temperature. However, it seems a complex and fiddly process, which also inevitably has safety implications. Do there really need to be so many steps involved with dropping down a few degrees?

As I head for the car park on the north side of Heathrow, I look again at the central console, the screen and the mirror arrangement (I almost felt as though I was in the dentist's chair), and I find both good and bad in it. Yes, it feels classy and space-age, but if the controls take me this long to work out, then either something is wrong with the car or with me. I mentioned that Neil had quickly grasped its technical workings, and enjoyed the challenge of figuring out how to change the display, convert Centigrade to Fahrenheit or reduce the volume of the satnav voice. But even he couldn't work out where the fuel gauge had gone...

I was left scratching my head as I bade a brief goodbye and headed for Terminal 5 and a flight to the Project EDWARD event in Rome.

Friday

A day of packing, planning and making ready to load the car, prior to tomorrow's big drive to deliver my daughter to university. There are all sorts of configurations for the Picasso, using anything from two to seven seats, and a manufacturer figure of 2,181 litres of load space with five seats stowed. Even though there will be three of us on board, it's still an absolute cinch, so the journey to the south coast should be achieved in complete comfort.

Weekend

The journey passed without incident, and there was even lots of space for a big supermarket shop before depositing one excited daughter. I had by now become used to clicking a button to receive information on the car's range, but then suddenly the fuel gauge was back with us on the screen. A happy end to an interesting week: we loved the space, the light and the great looks. But even after a week we were still confused by some of the screens, buttons and on-board technology.

VERDICT: ★★★★★