

Chrysler PT Cruiser

Featured model: 2.0 Limited



DRIVING A PT (FOR "PERSONAL transport") is certainly the way to get attention. Chrysler's retro-styled solution to "they all look the same these days", combines head-turning looks with a generous measure of practicality. It's as if a Chicago mobster from the thirties woke up one morning, decided to go straight and design an MPV instead.

Within the Zafira/Picasso-sized exterior is an extremely spacious five-seater, with a split rear bench that folds with spring assistance or removes entirely – although the bigger bit takes some manhandling.

Behind, a really rigid load cover performs all sorts of tricks but, incongruously, fails to take advantage of the full height between load floor and window line, to optimise luggage capacity with it in situ; our chart shows the added capacity by not having it fitted.

There's a tailgate sill to negotiate, but it's well protected – unlike the rear door sills. The front and rear cushions are set at non-stooping height (for the less agile), but our top-trimmed seats' leather upholstery did no favours for lateral support – at front and rear – in brisker cornering.

The driving position is good in a bus-type sort of way, with plenty of adjustments for seat and wheel disposition. A short-throw gearshift and fairly weighty clutch are better for knowing, but some features inside are just old-fashioned, like the low-set rockers below the heater (out of sight) and the button that has to be pressed before the

key can be removed from the ignition.

A good radio with CD and cassette is up to the minute, but its nearside wing-mounted aerial isn't going to survive long before bushes in country lanes or vandals in town streets damage it.

The PT's rear is easy to judge (once the rear head restraints are removed), but the whereabouts of the front wings is a different matter.

As a town car, the poor turning circle and vibrant, agricultural-sounding engine let the PT Cruiser down – it just sounds and feels like the car looks. Overtaking ability is only respectable if you let it rev through the gears, but mid-range cruising puts the engine in a better light.

Its trim handling isn't matched by the suspension's ride over indifferent surfaces; it can jolt and jostle quite noticeably at times.

VERDICT

Like several Southeast Asian offerings (that all look alike) the distinctive PT Cruiser is an innocuous, competent performer – but it's much more expensive; you can't justify choosing the Cruiser on its dynamic abilities. Its accommodation features, though useful, can be matched or bettered by European MPVs that still easily undercut its price. No, its unique appeal is all down to its looks. "I like it because it's different" – but is that enough?

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

SPECIFICATION

engine 1996cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 140bhp at 5700rpm, 139 lb ft at 4150rpm; belt-driven twin overhead camshafts, 16 valves

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 22.6 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 18.9 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts with integral coil springs.

Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle with trailing arms, Watt linkage, coil springs
steering hydraulic power assistance; 2.8 turns lock-to-lock; 11.85m diameter turning circle between kerbs (16.2m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear, with standard anti-skid control (ABS) on. Touring and Limited versions

wheels/tyres 6in alloy with 205/55R16H tyres on Limited version tested; full-size steel spare

LIKES...

electric-folding door mirrors
adaptable rear load cover
volume controls on all four facia vents
compass display in roof

and GRIPES

rear head restraints block driver's view
poor seat lateral location
incessant chime (door open/key in lock)
no rear heating

THE PT CRUISER RANGE

size/type lower medium (mid-priced)
MPV-style estate car

trim levels Classic, Touring, Limited

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/2.0 litre/140 bhp
diesel: none

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; 4-speed stepped automatic (with torque converter) optional

OVERTAKING ABILITY ★☆☆○○					
<i>High gearing keeps engine noise at bay almost to legal limit, but feels agricultural below 2000rpm, with doleful in-gear response</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	3.5	11.8	18.6		
30-50mph	4.3	10.4	14.0		
40-60mph	5.0	11.2	14.6		
50-70mph	6.5	13.1	17.3		
30-70mph	10.8	23.5	31.3		
max speed in each gear (*using 6000rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	31½	56½	81	114	117

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★★○○			
<i>Good head and legroom with uncluttered seat folding, but seats heavy to remove. Head restraints seriously impair vision. Cushion height assists entry and egress for less spry passengers</i>			
<i>in centimetres (5-door semi-MPV)</i>		<i>inside († with no sunroof)</i>	
outside		front - legroom	86-108
length	429	- headroom	99-103†
width - inc mirrors	189	rear - typical leg/	105/
- mirrors folded	177	kneeroom	75
height (no roof bars)	160	- headroom	98
load sill height	9/64	- hiproom	124-127
<i>(inside/outside)</i>		load space (all seats in use)	
steering		<i>(litres/cu ft) 337/11.9 (454/16.0*)</i>	
turns lock-to-lock	2.8	load length	66-137
turning circle (metres)	11.85	full length to fascia	249
easy to park/garage?		load width	100-107
	★★★○○	load height (to shelf/	49(66*)
		to top of aperture)	/94
* to top of rear seats			

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★○○	
<i>Rear wiper and heated tailgate rockers too low and obscure. Precautionary clutch depression before starter works – a good idea but a bane in practice. Poor daytime dial lighting</i>	



HOW THE PT CRUISER 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)
CHRYSLER PT CRUISER	4/1996/140	3100	10.8	31.3/23.5	28	26/41	108	105/75	2.8/11.85	429
Citroën Picasso 2.0 HDi (d)	4/1997/90	2480	14.0	27.0/18.6	50	26/16	106	95/72	3.3/11.95	428
Renault Scenic 2.0 16v	4/1998/140	3120	9.7	26.9/17.6	30	24/50	106	102/76	3.5/10.6	413
Vauxhall Zafira 1.8	4/1796/115	3630	11.3	22.4/16.3	32	27/14	103	102/75	3.2/11.0	432
Ford Focus 2.0 estate	4/1989/130	3120	9.5	24.9/16.7	33	26½/15	107	100/71	2.9/10.6	444
Toyota Picnic 2.0 (auto)	4/1998/126	2880	11.9	Auto	29	27/18	107	102/80	3.3/11.4	453

(d) diesel *all with ABS

SAFETY ★★☆☆○	
<i>Fade-resistant, but un reassuring handbrake and emergency best stop needs too much pedal pressure. Five "proper" belts and front/side airbags</i>	
braking	dry road stopping distance
pedal feel ★★★○○	<i>from 50 mph (with standard ABS)</i>
in emergency ★★○○○	pedal load distance
handbrake ★★○○○	10kg 35½m
	41kg 26m <i>best stop</i>
	+4kg ie 45kg 26m

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS
Chrysler PT Cruiser not yet tested

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

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★○○	
<i>Trim handling with reasonably responsive steering – indifferent turning circle, though</i>	



COMFORT ★★☆☆○	
<i>Ride rather abrupt over poorer surfaces. Reasonable front heating/ventilation, but none behind. Cruises quietly in the mid range, but vibrant below 2000rpm</i>	

FUEL ECONOMY ★★☆☆○	
<i>Mediocre result – not as good as official figures suggest. Highest tax band and Group 13 insurance rating</i>	
AA test results (mpg)	official figures (mpg)
worst (hard/urban) 21	urban 24.6
best (gentle/rural) 34	extra urban 40.4
overall mpg on test 28	combined 32.5
realistic tank capacity 49 litres	CO ₂ emissions 205g/km
typical range 300 miles	car tax band D