

Peugeot 406 Estate

Featuring 3.0 V6 Executive automatic



WE'VE TESTED PEUGEOT'S POPULAR 406 with a variety of engines, but have hitherto missed out on the most powerful one, the 24-valve, three-litre V6. The estate car body has also managed to elude us, so what better excuse for combining the two in one report? And let's add the optional automatic transmission for good measure.

The estate car bodywork adds 18cm to the 406's overall length, but it's all to the benefit of space at the business end. This makes sense, because occupants are already adequately catered for in the, in this case, classy leather-clad, wood-trimmed cabin.

Any fears that the estate's additional weight (it amounts to about 50kg) will have any serious effect on the car's performance are quickly dispelled as soon as you reach an uncongested road and open up this gorgeous V6 motor. Even the power-sapping four-speed automatic transmission appears to do little to inhibit the eager thrust of acceleration, once this quad-cam engine works its multi-valve magic. It reels off 30-70mph in a swift 8.6sec, pressing on to 135mph flat out, while emitting a harmonious howl from under the bonnet.

It seems indecently quick for a working wagon – albeit an executive one – with the power delivery so smooth

and the gearchanges almost seamless in their shifts.

Part-throttle downshifts are nicely timed, too, thanks partly to this transmission's ability to adapt its change points to suit one's driving style. But full-bore kickdown changes can create a flurry of commotion; however, such unseemly behaviour is eliminated by a more discreet manual downshift with a quick flick on the selector lever, which slithers smoothly through a serpentine slot.

Alternatively, you can select sport mode and prevent top gear from engaging. This is not only useful on hilly, twisty roads, but gives even more spirited performance by inducing earlier downchanges and extending upshift points – albeit at the cost of more fuel, of course.

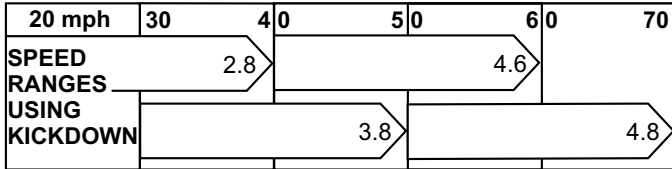
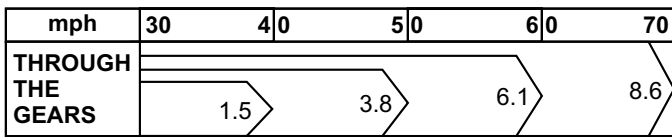
Most drivers will select D and let the gear train take the strain, enjoying serene, long-legged top gear cruising (when moderate tyre noise is the most audible feature) and the prospect of lower-30s fuel consumption. At steady motorway speeds, however (when the transmission is locked up and no gas-guzzling torque converter slip takes place), the three-litre's thirst actually diminishes, resulting in about 34mpg.

The poise and alertness of response of the 406 saloon are retained in the estate. Its precision of steering and the way it can be hustled round bends and tight turns with

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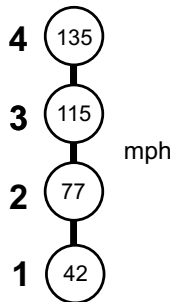
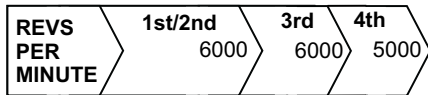
PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds



Maximum speeds

using accelerator kickdown



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade: unleaded 95 octane petrol

Type of use - air conditioning off*	mpg
In the city - heavy traffic	16
In the country - quiet driving	31
Typical mpg overall	26
Realistic tank range†	63 litres/360 miles

† based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience - not nominal tank capacity

*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2-4% in winter and 4-8% in summer

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type transverse V6 with alloy block and heads; four main bearings

Size 87.0 x 83.0mm = 2946cc

Power 187bhp at 5500rpm

Torque 197 lb ft at 4000rpm

Valves two belt-driven overhead camshafts per bank operating four valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point injection integrated with programmed distributorless direct ignition. 70-litre fuel tank with low-level warning light and digital range display

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual standard - optional four-speed automatic fitted to test car; front-wheel drive

Mph per 1000rpm 27.0 in 4th, 19.2 in 3rd

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts with integral coil springs and lower wishbones. Rear: three transverse links, single trailing arms and coil springs. Telescopic dampers and anti-roll bars all round

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance; 3.1 turns between full locks. Turning circle diameters average 11.4m between kerbs, with 16.7m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 6½J x 15 alloy with 205/60R15W tyres (Michelin Pilot Primacy on test car). Full size (steel) spare

Brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with servo. Electronic ABS and brake force distribution standard

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Seatbelts

front height adjustable, pre-tensioning with load limiters
rear 3 fixed-height lap and diagonal inertia-reel

Airbags

driver
passenger with deactivate switch
others 16-litre front side

Head restraints

front height and tilt-adjustable, removable
rear 3 height adjustable, removable

Other features

ABS and electronic brake force distribution, front door impact absorbent padding, "doors open" tell-tale graphic

Euro NCAP crash test results (1997 saloon model)

front and side impact rating
Pedestrian test rating

Door locking

central locking?
remote control?
auto window closure?

Luggage

secure from interior/hidden from view

Ignition switch/immobiliser

Alarm

assessment of effectiveness and convenience - the more black blobs the better

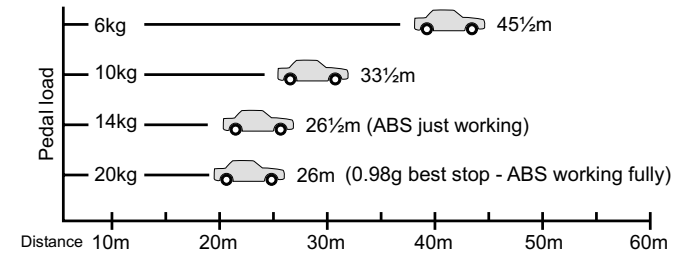
factory fitted optional extra
standard on this model
not available on this model

BRAKES

Pedal feel Behaviour in an emergency Handbrake

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with standard ABS)

A good-to-average best stop with ABS is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal



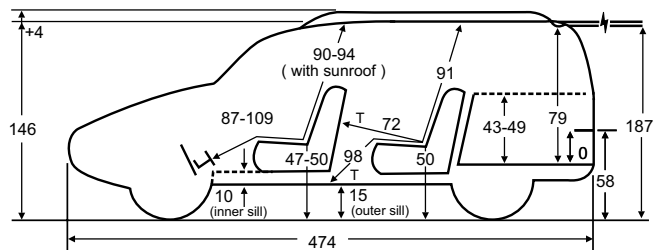
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:

11kg at start of test, 11kg at end of test (Ideal brakes show no change)

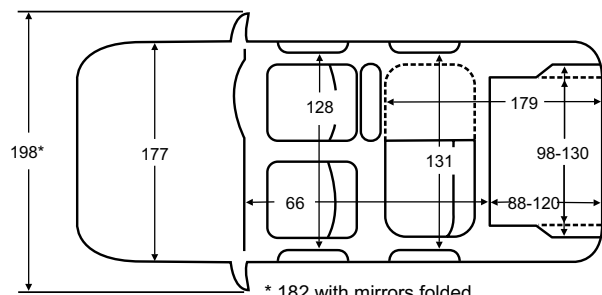
MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

Five-door estate



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



kerb weight: 1525kg (maker's figure)

almost sporty zeal and well-controlled roll, is pretty impressive. Less so the ride. True, the suspension is masterfully composed on most main roads, but at lower speed on broken secondary surfaces, progress is disappointingly harsh and jiggly. The expensive, stiff-walled, low-profile tyres (W-rated and good for 169mph) are partly responsible for this lack of suppleness, but the suspension settings on an estate car, with its wide load variations, have to be something of a compromise – unless it's a Citroën Xantia. With more weight on board, the low-speed fidgeting is mollified.

The heated, leather-trimmed electric front seats are well-shaped and comfortable. And thank goodness there are his-and-her memory settings on the multi-adjustable driver's seat – it takes so long to find the ideal combination, you don't want to lose it! The steering wheel is adjustable for rake and reach, too, there's a decent footrest alongside the double-width brake pedal and four column stalks work most of the controls (including the cruise control and radio/CD player).

All round vision is excellent (best to remove the three rear head restraints when possible, though), aided by an auto dipping interior mirror, rain-sensing wipers and a double-angle offside mirror. We appreciated the comprehensive multi-function computer, too, but its messages are difficult to decipher in bright light.

Passengers in the back are less well catered for, because although legroom and footspace are more than adequate (though not as generous as in some rivals), the backrest is rather upright and there's little side support and no centre armrest. It's much nicer in the back of the 406 saloon. Fortunately most people sit high enough to benefit from modest thigh support, but then this means that headroom isn't over-generous – the roof scoop is too far back. The doors open wide, but there's a highish sill to lift feet over.

Step round to the back and you find that when the back seats are folded forwards, the load area is completely flat and helpfully wide, thanks to only slim wheelarch intrusion. The folding arrangement isn't ideal, though; there's nowhere to stow the removed head restraints, the seatbelts hamper raising the lowering the seatbacks, and the backrests' release buttons are neither lockable nor concealed. They do, however, have red warning posts that show when the seat isn't properly latched.

There's no denying how nicely trimmed and presented the spacious cargo area is, though. Four tie-down loops and an elasticated net restrain unruly loads, while plastic strips protect the thick, foam-backed load deck carpeting. Valuables can be hidden from sight by the rear shelf that contains a roller blind. It's a bit fiddly to clip into slots at the rear, but easy enough to remove completely as a cassette. There are a pair of neat lockers on either side of the load area – the left one housing the CD autochanger.

Loading is easy as there's no rear sill, but the polished aluminium trim panel is likely to be scuffed, and beware the rear bumper – it's so shaped as to retain moisture and muck that can get on your clothing.

VERDICT

Although transforming the 406 estate from limo to load-lugger isn't without its irritations, there can be few more pleasant ways of shifting big loads – or two sets of golf clubs – than in this hushed and refined three-litre V6.

It's a pity that too much back seat comfort and low-speed ride quality are sacrificed for the sake of practicality, because otherwise the 406 estate not only combines stylish spaciousness with a host of creature comforts, but also performs with remarkable verve and handles with poise and agility. All in all, it's a pleasure to do business with.

LIKES AND GRIPES

“Just right” driving position (eventually)	...	but front seat armrests too steeply angled
Clear displays, including oil temperature and service interval info	...	but speedometer is a bare-faced liar (reads 75mph at a true 70)
Smooth-acting gear selector is easy to use	...	but adjacent numbering and S and W switches not repositioned for RHD
Clever “fuzzy logic” transmission gives swift, silky shifts	...	but engine can give an offputting accelerative surge after an upshift
Climate control air conditioning standard and works well	...	but airflow doesn't do exactly what distribution control promises
Twin gas struts hold tailgate high	...	but plastic hand pull to close it feels cheap

HOW THE 406 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 (m/kg)	Maximum legroom - front (cm)	Typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	Steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
PEUGEOT 406 3.0 V6 EST (AUTO)	V6/2946/194	2640	8.6	Auto	26	26/20	109	98/72	3.1/11.4	474
Ford Mondeo 2.5 V6 Est (man) †	V6/2544/170	2950	8.2	15.0/21.7	29	27½/18	109	100/71	3.0/10.4	463
Jeep Grand Cherokee 4.0 (auto)	6/3960/174	2270	10.6	Auto	20	28/22	107	105/73	3.3/11.6	450
Saab 9-5 2.0 Est (man)	4/1985/150	2350	9.5	30.7/16.3	31½	25½/32	110	103/79	2.9/11.0	481
Vauxhall Omega 2.5TD Est (auto) ^d	6/2498/130	2350	14.0	Auto	31½	24/18	114	95/70	3.1/10.7	482
VW Passat 2.5 V6 TDi Est (auto) ^{d†}	V6/2496/150	2240	9.4	Auto	36	24½/18	112	100/78	2.8/10.9	467
Volvo V70 Classic 2.4 Est (man)	5/2435/140	2650	10.2	28.7/20.0	29½	25½/22	109	106/78	3.3/10.5	472
† performance and economy figures for saloon equivalent		d diesel		* all with ABS				(p) all power assisted		