

Citroën Xsara Picasso

Featured model: 2.0HDi SX



COMPACT MULTI-PURPOSE-vehicle sales are booming, and it was Peugeot-Citroën's domestic arch-rival Renault that established the scene with its Scenic.

The Picasso is Citroën's reposte, and it, too, is strictly a lofty five-seater with musical-chair possibilities. However, it's also a bit longer and wider and this shows to advantage inside, in most dimensions except rear legroom, which suffers because you can't put your feet under the front seats.

There's good elbow room and it has a more commodious luggage area behind, with a two-position tailgate opening and no load sill to speak of. There's even a collapsible wheelie-trolley strapped to one side.

All three back seats tilt forwards, but only the centre one slides fore and aft or can be folded to reveal a work-surface. There's a plethora of oddments spaces and the uncluttered space between the front seats makes front-to-rear access feasible. These front seats are comfortable, too, and you can enjoy a clear view over hedges.

The wheel and seat both have limited height adjustments, the unlikely-looking gearchange proves remarkably well engineered and the central, digital instrument displays are visually striking at first. In practice, bright sun or daytime use of lights reduces their legibility.

The otherwise pleasant 1.8 petrol version we tried earlier felt less composed

in its department than the (heavier) diesel tested here; this engine suits the Picasso to a tee. It's not an agile car, neither is the engine particularly quick, but thus powered, the Picasso's regal progress, with an excellent ride over poor roads, is arguably best in class.

So, too, is the fuel economy, although Picasso does better, relatively speaking, when pottering around locally than it can manage in higher speed motorway use, when the engine also assumes a harder edged gruffness. At 50 to 60mph it's imperceptible.

Even the cheaper LX is well equipped, especially with safety features, while "multiplex" wiring makes other aids to easy living possible, including interval wipers and radio volume that vary in response to road speed, as well as providing alert messages in the digital display about doors ajar, frost risk and even if the remote handset's batteries are running low.

VERDICT

Comfort, space and poise are Picasso's significant assets on the move – with surprising fuel economy, as well, when you finally pull alongside the diesel dispenser. It's not so refined at higher speed, neither does it relish being rushed around bends. Take it easy, however, and it will convey five – and all their luggage – in style.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

SPECIFICATION

engine 1997cc 4 cylinder turbo-diesel; 90bhp at 4000rpm; 151 lb ft at 1900rpm. Belt-driven single overhead camshaft, 8 valves. Direct injection with common rail high-pressure fuel delivery

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive. 28.2mph/1000rpm in 5th; 22.7 in 4th

suspension front: independent 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; 11.95m diameter turning circle between kerbs

brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear with standard ABS

wheels/tyres 15in steel with 185/65R15 tyres (Michelin on test car); full-size spare

LIKES AND GRIPES

walk-through-to-rear access
five proper belts and head restraints
space for every sort of oddment
rear load cover can be stowed erect

cramped pedal layout - footrest too close
digital displays can be hard to read
heat/vent fan won't run without engine
still only one year's warranty

THE PICASSO RANGE

body mid-sized MPV

trim levels LX, SX

engines petrol: 4cyl 1.6/95bhp; 4/1.8/117;

turbo-diesel: 4/2.0/90

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; no automatic option

OVERTAKING ABILITY ☆☆☆☆○					
<i>An amiable step-off from low speed (25mph in fourth) makes up for modest ultimate acceleration. Gearshift works better than its looks suggest</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	3.9	11.1	19.1		
30-50mph	5.3	8.9	14.1		
40-60mph	7.0	8.7	12.2		
50-70mph	8.7	9.7	12.9		
30-70mph	14.0	18.6	27.0		
max speed in each gear (*using 4300rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	23	43	70	97½	105½

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ☆☆☆☆○				
<i>Honest five-seater, though legroom restricted because there's no foot space under front seats. Massive load area – best in class</i>				
<i>in centimetres (5-door MPV)</i>		<i>inside († without sunroof)</i>		
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	
<i>(inside/outside)</i>		load space (all seats in use)		
steering		<i>(litres/cu ft)</i>	550/19.5	
turns lock-to-lock	3.3	load length	82/133	
turning circle (metres)	11.95	<i>(with back seats out)</i>	155	
easy to park/garage?		load width	116-126	
	☆☆○○○	load height (to shelf)	57/	
		<i>(to top of aperture)</i>	91-94	
* 74 with trays in use				

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ☆☆○○○	
<i>Digital displays look better than they prove – hard to see sometimes. Lower screen reflections in the sun create a serious hazard; better quarter vision than some MPV's, however</i>	
	

SAFETY ☆☆☆☆○	
<i>Impressive tally of injury-prevention features as standard; ABS brakes perform impeccably too</i>	
braking	dry road stopping distance
pedal feel ☆☆☆☆○	<i>from 50mph (with standard ABS)</i>
in emergency ☆☆☆☆○	pedal load distance
handbrake ☆☆☆☆○	10kg 37m
	16kg 26m best stop
	+4kg ie 20kg 26½m ABS on

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS
Xsara Picasso not tested yet

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

HANDLING AND STEERING ☆☆☆☆○	
<i>Stable handling (though you feel the roll) and nicely weighted steering; not as agile as an estate, though</i>	
	

COMFORT ☆☆☆☆○
Usual Xsara absorbency - not easily perturbed. Quiet until 70 limit approaches. Better front seats than Scenic, but a trifle high for shorter passengers

FUEL ECONOMY ☆☆☆☆○	
<i>Excellent for an MPV (even after instrument error discounted). Good range, with pessimistic computer warning count-down</i>	
type of use (air conditioning off)	AA test (mpg)
urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	34
suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	42
motorway (70mph cruising)	46½
cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	52
rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	60
typical mpg overall	50
realistic tank capacity/range	54 litres/595 miles
official mpg (urban/extra urban/combined)	40.4/61.4/51.4
CO ₂ emissions 147 g/km	car tax band A

HOW THE XSARA PICASSO COMPARES	engine cap/power (cyl/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/ kneeerom - rear (cm)†	steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	overall length (cm)
CITROËN PICASSO 2.0HDI	4/1997/90	2480	14.0	27.0/18.6	50	26/16	106	95/72	3.3/11.95	428
Vauxhall Zafira 1.6 16v*	4/1598/100	3630	13.1	27.0/18.8	35½	24½/18	103	102/75	3.2/11.0	432
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
Fiat Multipla 1.6*	4/1581/103	3780	12.7	29.2/20.6	29	27½/20	106	114/83	2.8/11.1	399
Toyota Picnic 2.0 (Auto)	4/1998/126	2880	11.9	NA	29	27/18	107	102/80	3.3/11.4	453
Citroën Synergie 2.0HDI	4/1997/110	2580	14.4	25.0/17.4	42	27/25	102	97/78	3.0/11.8	445

* petrol version

*all with ABS

†rearmost setting for second row