

CITROEN C4 CACTUS

By Jim Mc Cauley

It's a few decades since a manufacturer inlaid a car's bodywork with a contrasting material. There was a proliferation of timber sided estates in the USA in the 1960s while the sole move here was made by Ford with a wood panelled Cortina estate.



Now Citroen have brought the inlay back, not with wood, but with an automotive bubble-wrap that they refer to as Airbump, designed to absorb minor bumps. Depending on the paintwork colour, the grey plastic panels either complement or contrast with the main body colour, and while it may take some time to understand the panels, they do eventually grow to the point of acceptance. However, your overall appreciation of the juxtaposition of the textures and colours is continually distracted by the heavy roof bars which threaten the elegance of the otherwise sleek and elegant body form.

The juxtaposition continues in the interior, not so much in the material finish but in the arrogance of the sharp rectangular frames of the information panels interrupting the gentle softness of the main dashboard – for me a contrast too extreme, setting an uneasy tone in what should be a more restful vista stretching before the driver.

Available with a range of petrol and diesel engines, test choice was the 1.2 litre petrol model, its turbocharged and intercooled assistance producing 110 hp with a healthy torque figure of 205 Nm at 1500 rpm. This rockets the car from rest to 60 mph in 9 seconds with the potential to top 117 mph. While the gearbox only offers only five forward ratios, they are well spaced and provide smooth progression, but the gearchange could be smoother and the clutch pedal lighter to



balance its resistance with the other controls. And there is also a warning that innovation should know when to stop, with a steering wheel that follows modern trends with a flattened bottom area, but does it need a flattened top as well?

Steering response is good but requires vigilance on poorer surfaces, possibly due to the softer suspension set-up, and this also contributes to noticeable body roll through faster corners.



The cabin provides good room for both front and rear occupants while the boot is accessed over a high sill and provides a useful 358 litres of storage. Hard plastic door panels suggest a utilitarian finish as do the hinged windows in the rear doors and restricted cabin lighting at night from the limited output of the forward mounted courtesy light.

However, the main lighting requirement is well addressed and the headlights provide very good spread and penetration.

Although the small capacity engine in a vehicle this size may suggest a thirsty response to maintain good road pace, the test vehicle returned a surprising 45.2 mpg over a week's high mileage driving, representing a credible 75% of the official figure of 60.1 mpg on the combined cycle.

On the environmental front, the 1.2 litre petrol engine has a CO2 emissions of 107 gms/km, putting it in Band B for zero road tax. For business users the car has a BIK rating of 14% and for insurance purposes is rated in Group 16A. Safety features include Electronic Stability Control, Hill Start Assist and six airbags.

Overall, the C4 Cactus is a balancing act for Citroen using an enthusiastic and economical power train and proven underpinning to take their design language in a new direction. Most of it works, but there are elements that has slipped from the design department into final production without intermediate evaluation. They are not serious, but they are at odds with with what is otherwise a very good package and hold it back from being brilliant.

The model tested with the 3-cylinder petrol engine is priced at £17,290 and available extras include metallic paint at £425, insulated panoramic sunroof at £425 and city park pack with rear camera at £325. The model has a 5-star EuroNCAP rating and is covered by Citroen's 3-year / 60,000 mile warranty.