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Citroën C4 Cactus – First Impressions

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Author: Chris Adamson

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Chris Adamson is your guide...



The Oxford English dictionary defines cactus as: ‘a succulent plant with a thick fleshy stem



which typically bears spines, lacks leaves and has brilliantly coloured flowers



Not the most inspiring definition if you want to relate it to a car but I suppose you could reference the prickly nature of the plant to the response that some people seem to have on Citroën's latest C4 based cross-over which they have called... the Cactus.

Like so many of Citroën's designs over the years that have divided opinion into two distinct camps - the loves and the loathes - the Cactus has quite naturally received a mixed reception.

Certainly it is a brave free-for-all appearance from the impossibly thin headlights to the snub nose front end treatment, massive wheel arches fitted in this case with 17 inch diamond cut alloy wheels that look totally lost and the stick-on plastic door panel enhancements that give it a rugged urban street fighter ambience.

Its squat appearance means that the Cactus isn't the most capacious in its class, especially in terms of head room, but, thankfully, Citroën has gone for functionality rather than form in most areas.



This includes not one but two raised tablet-style display areas including a seven-inch touch-screen to control all primary vehicle functions. These are set into a harsh two-tier flat-topped plastic dashboard where, with much relief, Citroën hasn't going all imaginative on the controls and instrumentation.

When it comes to the rear side windows Citroën's futuristic dynamic takes a giant leap backwards - to side hinged manually opening units.

For a vehicle that is aimed at young families, Cactus is let down when it comes to functionality if not the overall capacity of the storage space starting with an unusually high rear sill and, to save money and space, rear seats that are a one-piece bench type, severely restricting the seat and luggage combinations.

Better news is that the seat goes flat so that the load space can vary from 358 litres (12.64 cu.ft) below the parcel shelf with the seats in places (which is up to 100 litres or 3.53 cu.ft more than many of its direct rivals) and a generous 1,170 litres (41.32 cu.ft) with the seats down - which is double at least one of its opponents.



Priced at well under £20,000 this version of the Cactus comes generously adorned with items such as cruise control, tyre pressure monitor, rear parking sensors and rear view camera, satellite navigation, Hill Start Assist, automatic air conditioning and a six speaker DAB radio with MP3 player, Bluetooth connection and Hi-Fi upgrade

On the Road

Under the flat top bonnet nestles a transversely mounted 1560cc four-cylinder high compression common rail turbocharged and intercooled 110 bhp diesel unit that clearly announces its initial operation but then settles down to a gentle throb that doesn't get too

intrusive.



The five speed manual transmission is positive and clear with a ratio spread designed more for economy than outright performance, hence a nought to 62 mph sprint time that is close on 11 seconds.

Docile in traffic and competent on the open road, Cactus is sadly not as rapid as drivers might hope for when nipping in and out of town traffic - where this is going to spend most of its time.



Better news is that with emissions rated at 92 g/km it's going to be free of road tax (until the Government changes the bandings) and, if Citroen's figures are to be believed, drivers should be able to get close on 80 miles to the gallon which means something in excess of 750 miles between refuelling.

I didn't have enough time in the Cactus to get an accurate consumption reading but these figures do look very optimistic unless you adhere very strictly to the gear efficiency indicator.

Behind the electric power assisted steering wheel the Cactus is competent if a little lifeless in its responses, indicating that it might be better suited to rough surfaces than flat tarmac.

Ride quality is one of the best achievements on the Cactus. Firmer than many a rival SUV (in part due to the low roof line), it feels more secure and planted on the road.

The MacPherson strut front suspension and spring torsion bar at the rear may be very basic in design but work extremely well in this case to offer a stable and consistent driving experience.

Verdict

Cactus isn't the most versatile of compact SUVs but it does have plenty of space and an undeniably quirky personality that only Citroën could get away with.



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Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in brief:

Citroen C4 Cactus Flair Blue HDi 100

Engine: 1560cc turbocharged high pressure common rail diesel

Transmission: Five speed manual, driving the front wheels

Power: 73 kW (100 bhp) @ 3,750 rpm



Torque: 254 Nm (187 lbft) @ 1,750 rpm

Performance:

0-62mph: 10.6 seconds

Top Speed: 114 mph

Fuel Consumption (Official Figures):

Urban: 67.3 mpg

Extra-Urban: 91.1 mpg

Combined: 80.7 mpg

CO2 Emissions: 92 g/km

Price (On the Road): £18,090 (test car - £18,765)