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New Peugeot 308 GTi from Peugeot Sport – Road Test

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Our own 'Santa Claus', alias David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) delivers...

'A CHRISTMAS CRACKER' ROAD TEST- THE NEW 308 GTI BY PEUGEOT SPORT

In the PSA, Peugeot, Citroen and DS, group of brands Peugeot's aim is to move their brand up-market and part of this process is to further inject some sporting pedigree into a family best known in the main for their fuel efficient, family and business orientated models.

This process of reclaiming their sporting prowess they started with the legendary 205 GTi launched in 1983 is already underway. The Peugeot Sport arm of the business has already engineered the RCZ-R 1.6 THP 266 bhp 2+2 sports coupe and the 208 GTi 1.6 THP 208 bhp three door B-sector supermini. Now comes their larger C-segment five door 308 GTi hatchback with a 1.6-litre THP turbo petrol engine with the choice of either 248 or 266 bhp power outputs and both have a fuel and CO2 saving Stop&Start function.

The 308 GTi with 248 bhp costs £26,555 and the 266 bhp with its added power and equipment costs £28,155. Peugeot UK expects to sell around 600 of these models in the UK in 2016. Initially there is a sales preference for the more powerful model but after the 'early-adopters' it is expected the sales split between the two models will be 50/50.

So what do you get for your money in addition to impressive performance? Well a choice of six body colours plus the signature £1,300 Coupe Franche for the 266 bhp model. This has a separation-line design where the rear end is pearlescent Nera Black and the front two thirds of the body carries Ultimate Red.

Both versions have a distinctive GTi grille with chequered flag design, sports front bumper skirts, sports side skirts, black rear under bumper diffuser flanked by two large twin bore exhaust pipes, an 11 mm lowered ride height, sports suspension, GTi badging, GTi door sill finishers, 18-inch alloy wheels, or 19-inch ones for the 266 bhp version, tinted rear windows, full LED headlamps, daytime running lights and front sequential indicators. Inside there is a



9.7-inch multifunction colour touchscreen which is part of Peugeot's i-Cockpit clutter-free design, sat-nav, Bluetooth connectivity, trip computer, sports style seats, GTi style steering wheel, aluminium style pedals and door sill guards, dual zone air-con, cruise control, auto wipers and lights, electrically operated windows and mirrors, reversing camera, front and rear parking sensors and Open & Go keyless entry with push-button start.

Specific to the 266 bhp model, apart from the larger wheels, is the much needed torsion limited slip front wheel drive differential, red painted brake callipers with 380 mm front discs and 268 mm ones at the rear, plus GTi bucket sports seats with leather effect and half Alcantara suede type fabric upholstery.

All these features are wrapped up in and around the relatively popular Peugeot 308 five door hatchback body which ensures the GTi versions can double up as a family or business-use transport as well as more enthusiastic driving for motorsport or track-day events. Its competitors include the VW Golf GTi, Audi S3, Ford Focus ST, Honda Civic Type-R and the Seat Leon Cupra.



So what of the 308 GTi's performance? Both versions have similar figures with a top speed of 155mph, Combined Cycle fuel economy of 47.1 mpg, CO2 emissions of 139 g/km with the lower powered engine covering zero to 62 mph in 6.2 seconds whilst the marginally more powerful unit takes just 6.0 seconds. For both engines the VED road tax is £130 each year and company car drivers will pay 22% Benefit-in-Kind tax. Insurance is rated as Group 34.

I have just had a really enjoyable spell testing the GTi in its 270 (266 bhp) Coupe Franche form but I'm not sure I could live with the separation-line paintwork design, although it will be an eye-catcher in the showrooms.

The lowered suspension, wider front and rear tracks, and the flared wheelarches gives the five door hatchback a 'planted' stance on the road that works well in practise with the firmer sports suspension and larger brakes. The standard 308 models have always provided



a comfortable and compliant ride but not always sharp enough in the handling department although the small diameter steering wheel does provide quick steering responses making it seem agile. The GTi's suspension changes still provide a refined, settled and smooth ride even with the larger 19-inch wheels and low profile tyres. Only the worst impacts from potholes are felt inside the car.

The torsion limited slip differential does wonders for minimising torque-steer with 266 bhp and 330 Nm of torque going through the front wheels which have to steer as well. Straight-line acceleration grip with its traction control element is predictable and well balanced between the two wheels. The cornering understeer is minimal and what there is can be predicted even on wet roads. The differential channels the torque to the wheel with the highest traction so grip during cornering is maintained for fast acceleration out of bends. Not only does the GTi visually look 'planted' on the road, it feels that way as well driving in adverse road conditions. The bonus is that it does all this and remains comfortable and well balanced.

The really strong point of the new model is the 1.6-litre, four-cylinder, high pressure direct injection turbocharged petrol engine with 266 bhp and that all important 330 Nm of torque available from 1,900 to 5,000 rpm. It is very responsive and smooth, pulling strongly throughout the wide rev range. It is this foot-down and go response during acceleration from 30 mph up to and over the maximum legal 70 mph that makes this engine ideal for UK roads. It can dismiss slower traffic during overtaking very swiftly, cruise effortless at the legal maximum motorway speeds yet remain flexible at low in-town traffic speeds.

Although the engine is mated to a six-speed close ratio box, gearchanging is a minimal requirement with that broad spread of responsive torque. But when the mood takes you, or the traffic conditions allow, the gearchange is slick so drop-a-cog or two and the power zips in and driving becomes fast and fun. Overall during my week long test, mostly in appalling weather conditions, the 308 GTi 266 bhp returned 40.2 mpg overall covering motorway, country A/B roads and the pre-Christmas shopping queues of traffic in and out of towns. Yes that figure is still short of the official 47.1 mpg - but not by that much given the driving



satisfaction it offers.

VERDICT

First the bad news... Not so satisfying are the inherent problems I have with the 308 hatchback range. There is limited rear seat legroom and the slow touchscreen system which controls a whole host of functions. It is slow to use and it is really unnecessary to operate the heating and ventilation system via the screen. Just to make a change to the temperature or the fan speed means the driver's eyes are not concentrating on the road but looking and prodding a finger at a difficult to use screen.

In all other aspects the new 308 GTi really is an easy and rapid family hatchback to live with. It is not hard-core, peaky and frantic performance, it is much more sophisticated than that and none the worse for it either. It really is a cracker just in time for Christmas.

For: Rapid, sophisticated power delivery, sure-footed acceleration and handling, relatively low running costs, compliant comfortable ride, classy interior quality with high specification of equipment, good for the brand image.

Against: Limited rear seat leg space, large boot but the rear seat backs do not fold fully flat, infotainment and heating/climate functions have to be operated via the touchscreen - slow and requiring the driver to take his or her eyes off the road.

Seasonal greetings to you all and a very happy motoring New Year in 2016.



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MILESTONES AND WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF:

Peugeot 308 GTi 1.6 THP 270 S&S, 5-door.

Engine: 1.6 litre, 4 cylinder, high pressure turbocharged petrol, 266 bhp, 330 Nm of torque from 1,900 rpm to 5,000 rpm, Stop&Start.

Transmission: 6-speed manual with torsion limited slip differential.

Performance:



0-62mph: 6.0 seconds.

Top speed: 155 mph.

Fuel consumption: 47.1 mpg Combined Cycle (40.2 mpg on test).

CO2 emissions: 139 g/km, VED road tax £130, BIK company car tax 22%.

Insurance group: 34E.

Warranty: 3 years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,235 mm (13.89 ft), W 1,804mm (5.92 ft), H 1,446mm (4.75 ft), boot/load space 470 to 1,309 litres (16.60 to 46.23 cu.ft), 5 doors/5 seats.

Price: £28,155 + £1,300 for the Coupe Franche split colour scheme.