Chrysler 300C

Published: April 14, 2013

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/chrysler-300c/



If you are in the market for a large luxury saloon your choice is normally restricted to the big four from Germany, Lexus from Japan or Jaguar from Britain – that is unless you have a taste for transatlantic indulgence.

Tracing its heritage back to the Yank Tanks of the 50s, the Chrysler 300C is a big front engine rear-wheel drive barge of a vehicle that last appeared in UK showroom three years ago but made very little impression.

Now under the wing of European giants Fiat, the Canadian built 300C is back with more distinctive styling, more equipment than you can throw a stick at and a price tag that shaves

the cost of a small supermini off its rivals.

A new horizontal chrome grille treatment is the most obvious visual difference to the previous generation 300C which is still as bold and brutish as before.

There are also some front and rear revisions, including a strong sculpted front bumper, a steeper raked windscreen, vertical LED tail lamps, twin oval tail pipes and an integrated boot spoiler.

Like most large three-box saloons the luggage capacity is generous, if not class leading, at 481 litres, and it is surprising how even tall items slip in under the automatic boot lid.

And the rear seats do fold down, almost flat, which boosts the load capacity while added storage can be utilised in the wide and deep door pockets, the central arm-rest and a roomy glove compartment.

Rear passengers are well catered for with an extra 20cm more knee room in the sumptuously appointed chairs – pop the central arm rest down and two occupants feel like they are in a limousine.

Inside the 300C is awash with leather, chrome and wood furnishings – the latter in a muted matt finish that will polarise opinions, but which I don't find offensive.







YANK TANK FILLED TO THE BRIM

And there will be no complaints about the extensive list of kit that you get for under £40,000.

It starts with keyless entry and engine start, dual zone climate control, automatic wipers, nine speaker 900watt CD and radio multi-media system, electrically operated and heated and ventilated Napa front seats with four-way lumbar adjustment, heated rear seats, polish walnut steering wheel with hand-stitched leather, a twin sunroof set-up, satellite navigation on a huge 8.4inch touch screen. The equipment then goes onto adaptive cruise control, adaptive forward lighting, vehicle information display, plus blind spot and front impact warning sensors.

ITALIAN ENGINEERING

So far it has all been brash Americana, leaving the only evidence of Fiat's influence on the 300C resting with the second generation MultiJet 2 technology for the VM Motori built 3 litre turbocharged 60 degree V6 diesel engine, which turns it from a rather rough and ready unit into a much smoother and more pleasing power plant.

It uses a single variable geometry Garrett VGT 2056 turbocharger with intercooler and 24 valves for linear power application, while the common rail injection system operates at 1800 bar and the injectors at up to eight injections per cycle, to help maintain greater speed.

The graphite cast iron block with aluminium cylinder head engine, which previously

appeared in the Jeep Grand Cherokee, is remarkably quiet and sophisticated, and has been tuned to two power outputs; 188bhp and (as tested) or 236bhp – the latter sufficient to get it underway and reach 62mph in less than 7.5 seconds before powering gently on to a 144mph maximum.

For such a heavy beast fuel consumption is never going to be a highlight but I managed a best of 35mpg which was close to the maker's claim of 39mpg, and I consistently saw over 30mpg in all situations – which betters their 29mpg urban figure.

Emissions are the real Achilles heel of the 300C at 185g/km (191g/km if you go for the Executive version with 20inch wheels). This is on the high side and will have only the Chancellor rubbing his hands when it comes time for road tax.

Overall performance in all areas is restricted by the installation of a rather ordinary five speed semi-automatic transmission – in this class its rivals offer six, seven or even eight speed units which allow for greater flexibility and ultimately cleaner and more fuel efficient performance.

If you accept this then the driving experience is a rather pleasant and sedate one, power delivery is smooth and linear with a deceptive turn of speed when needed.

The one thing that prevents the 300C from being totally relaxing for the driver is the poor pedal position. The throttle is set deep and to the right at an awkward angle, and the brake pedal is far too high for comfort – so lots of leg travel is required to get between the two. And then there is the foot operated parking brake which, these days, feels dated and cumbersome.

Ride quality with the long wheel-base and near 50-50 weight distribution plus revised front and rear multi-link suspension with rubber bushes is good and rumble free on most surfaces, but the car can flex over pot holes, becoming unsettled and floating along, rather than gripping the road with absolute certainty.

The heavily revised electro-hydraulic power steering is well-assisted for a light touch at the wheel, but can be a bit lifeless at times and nowhere near as communicative as its Germanic opposition.

VERDICT – CRUISER WITH ALL THE KIT

In summary the 300C is a comfortable long distance cruiser packed to the gunwales with gadgets.

If you are marque conscious and find the Chrysler badge is a major deterrent then you could nip across the Channel and visit a Lancia dealer – exactly the same vehicle is being sold there as the Lancia Thema.

TECH SPEC IN BRIEF

Chrysler 300C Executive

Engine: 2987cc V6 24 valve turbocharged diesel, five-speed automatic transmission, rear-wheel drive
Power: 236bhp @ 4,000 rpm
Torque: 540 Nm @ 1600-2800
Top Speed: 144mph
0-62mph: 7.4 seconds
Fuel Consumption:
Urban – 29.4mpg
Extra Urban – 47.9mpg
Combined – 39.2mpg
Emissions: 191 g/km (VED Band J)

On the road price: £39,995