Citroën Berlingo Van Road Test

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A Versatile Load Carrier from Citroën

Words and Photos by Chris Adamson.

Napoleon Bonaparte reputedly described the English as a ‘nation of shopkeepers’ and in today’s modern economy it’s small businesses that keep the country working and, in turn, they need an efficient and practical form of transport to keep their company operating.

One vehicle that is helping to do this, ironically, is the French designed and built Citroën Berlingo, one of the most spacious and versatile examples of the modern crop of compact panel vans.

Its major asset for small businesses, particularly delivery companies, is the ease of access. Sliding side doors on both sides of the Berlingo mean that it can be parked facing either way on a street and goods can still be accessible from the pavement.

This is supplemented by asymmetric divided rear doors that not only open 90 degrees but can be unlatched to open a full 180 degrees, for maximum loading and unloading versatility when backed up against something like a loading bay.

Inside the cargo space has a low load floor and minimal wheel arch intrusion so that almost the full width of the vehicle (1.2 metres or 3.94 feet) can be used as storage with no awkward spaces either side of the arches.

The total inner space is a cavernous 4.1 cubic metres (144.8 cu.ft) which will take two Europallets with room to spare and offers (depending on specification) up to an 896 kg (1,975 lb) payload.

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Up front the three-seat cabin is full of clever little tricks and devices.

The middle passenger seat back can be folded down to reveal a useful work-top or the base popped up to reveal a 7.4 litre (0.26 cu.ft) multi-section storage box.

Next, both seat bases can be popped up to create an additional load space in the foot well, capable of taking good sized boxes – and it doesn’t stop there.

Drop down the solid panel in the bulkhead behind the passenger seats and fold the seat backs down and you have a long load area from front to rear of the vehicle that will accommodate items up to three metres (9.84 ft) in length. There is also a channel in the outer front seat back to create even more load depth.

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To these practical stowage solutions you can add in a large overhead storage compartment, door bins (in this case, not particularly large) a multi-section glove box, under-driver-seat storage box, chrome plated cargo space tie-down loops, synthetic floor cover and compartments in the dash for items such as pens and loose change.

If there is one slight compromise it is in leg room for the middle seat occupant as the gear lever housing eats into any knee room, realistically ruling it out for a full sized adult occupant.

High Specification

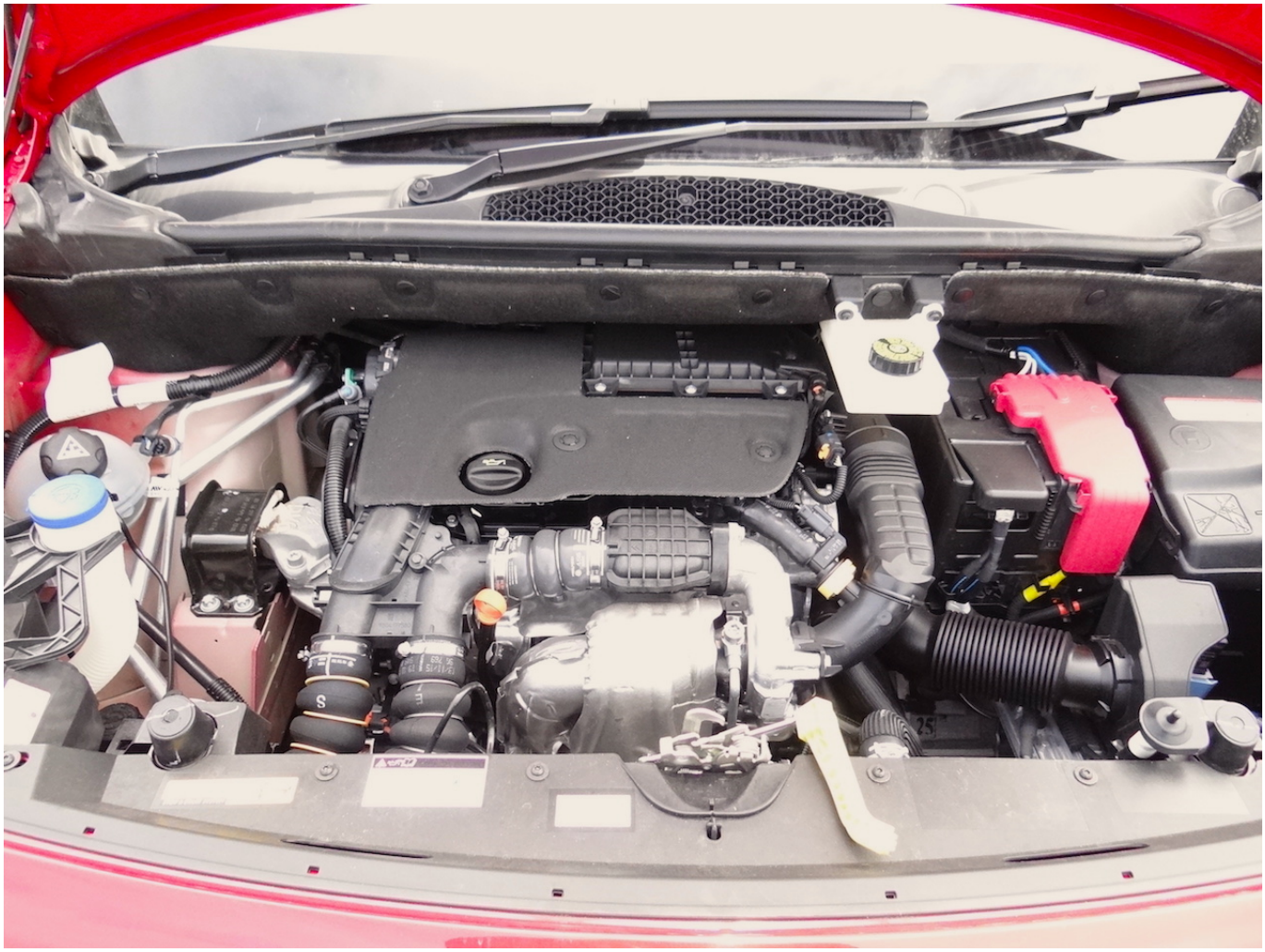
Vans used to offer the most Spartan of environments for the driver and passengers but these days commercial vehicles provide a significantly more welcoming working space.

On the Berlingo there are items such as electric windows, height and reach adjustable steering wheel and a vast windscreen with a thin A pillars, giving an almost panoramic view of the road ahead.

On the range topping Enterprise model, as tested, there is also a seven inch touch-screen central display for adjusting aspects such as the radio and Bluetooth connection, USB socket, air conditioning, rear parking sensors, an alarm system, clip-on Trafficmaster satellite navigation, rear parking camera (an essential item on any van these days), cruise control and a speed limiter.

On the Road

Among the choice of engines in the Berlingo range is a relatively quiet and efficient diesel unit bearing the latest Citroën Blue HDI technology badge, which claims to be among the cleanest in its class and meeting the Euro 6 standard on emissions.



In this case that’s 111 g/km on emissions which means low road tax and more than 65 mpg on fuel consumption – I managed well over 400 miles on a long distance journey with plenty of fuel left in the tank.

Fuel economy is aided by the engine stop-start system and an optimum gear selection indicator in the dashboard for the clean-operating five-speed manual transmission gearchange, which is conveniently mounted in the dashboard at the perfect arm height.

As well as operating with the minimum of fuss the engine also contributes to a surprisingly quiet cabin for a small panel van. There is little evidence of the usual hollow boom often

found in vans when unladen.

The independent MacPherson strut front and independent trailing arm rear suspension also does its job in keeping road noise down to a minimum while providing an unexpectedly good ride quality, the rebound on the springs being retarded so as not to induce excessive bounce when free of cargo.

Pulling everything together is a sophisticated electronics handling package that features anti-lock braking with Electronic Brakeforce Distribution, Electronic Stability Control and Hill Start Assist.

Finally, making sure the Berlingo is in the right place at the right time, is a smooth variable-assisted power steering set-up, just right for low sped manoeuvering into tight parking spaces and negotiating town traffic

Verdict

With different businesses making different demands on their vehicles it’s rare to find one that does a lot of things for a lot of people but the Berlingo certainly delivers on all fronts.

Wheels-Alive Tech Spec. in Brief:

Citroën Berlingo Enterprise Blue HDi 100.

Engine: 1560cc four cylinder high pressure direct injection diesel.

Transmission: Five speed manual.

Power: 73 Kw (98 bhp) at 3,750 rpm.

Torque: 254 Nm (187 lb.ft) @ 1,750 rpm.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 12.3 seconds.

Top Speed: 101 mph.

Fuel Consumption (Official Figures):

Combined: 67.3 mpg.

CO2 Emissions: 111 g/km.

Price (On the Road), from: £12,850 (as tested) £15,150